

DO NOT WITHDRAW

ROXBURGHSHIRE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

COUNTY LIBRARY

Readers are requested to take great care of the books while in their possession. If a book is found to be damaged on its return to the Library, the Reader in whose name it was issued will make good such damage.

All books should be returned to the Library within fourteen days from the date of issue; but an extension of the period of loan may be granted. A fine of Twopence may be charged for every week or part of a week a book is kept beyond that period.

Students using the County Library are reminded that the special resources of the Scottish Central Library are available to them. Applications for service from the Central Library should be accompanied by particulars of the books desired. All such applications should be made through the County Librarian, County Library, High Street, St. Boswells.

No.

Class.....

15,692 598.2

HODDER AND STOUGHTON'S
PEOPLE'S LIBRARY

General Editor: Sidney Dark

HODDER & STOUGHTON'S PEOPLE'S LIBRARY

General Editor: SIDNEY DARK.

H&S

NEW TITLES

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS (Three Vols.)	Viscount Grey of Fallodon, K.G.
HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE GOSPELS	Canon Anthony C. Deane
THE SECOND EMPIRE (Napoleon the Third)	Philip Guedalla
THE BEGINNINGS OF MAN	Edwin Oliver James
HOW TO ENJOY THE STARRY SKY	Marcus Woodward
HOW TO ENJOY HEALTH	Claude Lillingston
THE STORY OF THE HUGUENOTS	Arnold Lunn
THE EMPLOYMENT OF LEISURE	Sidney Dark
THE UNDERWATER WORLD	Charles L. Boulenger

TITLES ALREADY PUBLISHED:

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI	G. K. Chesterton
THE EVERLASTING MAN.	G. K. Chesterton
WHAT I SAW IN AMERICA	G. K. Chesterton
THE GOSPEL OF THE HEREAFTER	Archdeacon Paterson Smyth
A PEOPLE'S LIFE OF CHRIST	Archdeacon Paterson Smyth
JESUS CHRIST	Canon Anthony C. Deane
HOW TO ENJOY THE BIBLE	Canon Anthony C. Deane
RABBONI	Canon Anthony C. Deane
ST. TERESA	Mrs. Cecil Chesterton
CROMWELL	John Drinkwater
VICTORIAN POETRY	John Drinkwater
JOHN BUNYAN	The Dean of Winchester
THE LIFE OF THE FLY	J. H. Fabre
DR. JOHNSON AND COMPANY	Robert Lynd
THE GREATEST BOOK IN THE WORLD	T. H. Darlow
THE MIDDLE AGES	E. B. Osborn
CARDINAL NEWMAN	Canon William Barry
MEN OF LETTERS (Collected Essays, Vol. I)	Philip Guedalla
MEN OF AFFAIRS (Collected Essays, Vol. II)	Philip Guedalla
MEN OF WAR (Collected Essays, Vol. III)	Philip Guedalla
STILL LIFE (Collected Essays, Vol. IV)	Philip Guedalla
ADVENTURES IN FRIENDSHIP	David Grayson
THE LIFE OF THE SPIDER	J. H. Fabre
THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD AND OTHER ADDRESSES	Henry Drummond
SOME THINGS THAT MATTER	Lord Riddell
FOLDED HANDS	Richard King
NERVES IN DISORDER	Dr. A. T. Schofield
THAT BODY OF YOURS	Dr. J. W. Barton
HOW TO ENJOY WILD FLOWERS	Marcus Woodward
HOW TO ENJOY GARDEN FLOWERS	Marcus Woodward
HOW TO ENJOY THE COUNTRYSIDE	Marcus Woodward
QUEEN ELIZABETH	Sidney Dark
THE RENAISSANCE	Sidney Dark
HOW TO ENJOY LIFE	Sidney Dark
HOW TO ENJOY THE OLD MASTERS	Frank Rutter
THE POETRY OF ARCHITECTURE	Frank Rutter
HOW TO UNDERSTAND PHILOSOPHY	A. E. Baker
OUR DEBT TO GREECE AND ROME	E. B. Osborn
ST. PAUL'S LIFE OF CHRIST	Gwilym O. Griffith
PLANT LIFE	Grant Allen
COAL AND ITS STORY	E. A. Martin
HOW TO READ HISTORY	W. Watkin Davies
ATOMS AND ELECTRONS	J. W. N. Sullivan
TWELVE TESTS OF CHARACTER	Dr. H. E. Fosdick
EVERYDAY BIOLOGY	Professor J. Arthur Thomson

HODDER & STOUGHTON

H&S

LIMITED, LONDON, E.C.4

HOW TO ENJOY BIRDS

BY
MARCUS WOODWARD

ROXBURGHSHIRE
EDUCATION AUTHORITY
COUNTY LIBRARY

H&S

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LIMITED LONDON

425318

*Made and Printed in Great Britain for Hodder & Stoughton, Limited,
by C. Tinling & Co., Ltd., Liverpool, London and Prescott.*

Contents

CHAP.	PAGE
I. IN OUR GARDEN	13
II. IN THE DEER PARK	47
III. IN OUR VILLAGE	87
IV. BY HEDGE-ROW ELMS	101
V. IN SHADIEST COVERT	123
VI. ABOUT THE CORNFIELDS	143
VII. BY STREAM AND LAKE	159
VIII. OVER THE HILLS	179
IX. BY THE SILVER SEA	193
X. IN THE ALDER-HOLT	211
XI. ON THE MOORS	219
XII. ON MARSHES AND SAND-FLATS	233
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE	247
INDEX	251

Preface

Nec tenui penna

ONE day I found the publisher in no mood to discuss new projects for books ; one would have thought there was nothing he desired less than to think of publishing a book. He began to tell me about a garden of which he was newly possessed, and how, in the garden, there were birds :

The ousel-cock, so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill.

These birds, it seemed, distracted his attention at breakfast-time, when they would gather at a little table which somebody had set up outside the breakfast-room window ; and he had observed some remarkable points in their habits. He had discovered, and was certain, that the Robin's wife, Jenny-Wren, sang a different

song from her mate's; and it was not until he had made this discovery that he knew that hen birds sang. Still more remarkable, the Hedge-Sparrow sang the same tune as the Robin's wife. And this raised another puzzle: why should the Sparrow of the house merely chirp, while the Sparrow of the hedge warbled so blithely? Then among other curious discoveries he mentioned that his garden possessed a brown Blackbird!

I ventured to suggest the publication of a book about birds, which should solve the mysteries they present to a publisher.

"I might consider it, if," said the publisher, musing, "it were a very simple book—for people who know nothing about birds—yet not a text-book, mark you, but a book to make us see what pleasure we may gain from the company of birds; to show us that birds are more than feathers; to teach us, as it were, how to enjoy birds. It is a pleasant thing to be taught how to enjoy. . . ."

In the end, I went home, and copied from the journals I have kept for twenty years and more, recording my observations on birds, all the simplest passages I could find, showing how pleasant and lovely they are in their lives :

The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
The plain-song cuckoo gray,
Whose note full many a man doth mark,
And dares not answer nay.

MARCUS WOODWARD.

Christmas, 1928.

In Our Garden

Robin cocks and Jenny Wrens
Are God Almighty's cocks and hens.

IF the Robin is the best-loved of British birds, a main reason may be because it is the most friendly and familiar. It wins our hearts by the fearless way it takes possession of our gardens, and shares our labours—so confidingly perching on the spade-handle if we rest a moment—and by entering our homes to share our crumbs.

Not like a beggar is he come,
But enters as a looked-for guest.

It trusts, as the poet sings, in the power of its ruddy shield. Wordsworth's Robin was "the pious bird," a testimony to its burial of the Babes in the Wood. It is true, Bobbie goes often to church. But perhaps the poet never saw two Robins fighting. Pugnacity may be the truer key-note of the Robin's character than piety. John Donne hit off the bird's appeal in his phrase, "The household bird with the red stomacher."

One grove will not nurture two Robins, as the Romans said in a proverb, and some mysterious problems are raised by the saying. The parents go into retirement for the dangerous days of moulting, and may rarely be seen in the garden they have haunted since the last autumn. When they return, spruce in new feathers, and in fine fighting fettle, their offspring possess their Eden. Then comes the tug-of-war. Suppose the old cock, after days of battle, drives his hopefuls from his special grove, what fate befalls them? Some naturalists suggest they migrate overseas. They may go no farther than the next grove. Possibly one drives forth his parent—to what fate we know not. When a cock of a walk disappears, his place may be occupied forthwith by another. And so it has happened when a tame Robin has lived for season after season in a cottager's hovel, and has died at last by mischance—in the twinkling of an eye, another has appeared to reign in its stead, truly entering the cottage like a looked-for guest.

It is to be observed that the Robin of the garden in winter may not be identical with the Robin of summer, or come of the

same stock ; for the bird of summer may have journeyed south, and left its domain to some wanderer from the north. There is no doubt that Robins have a strong migratory instinct, while Continental Robins are notable travellers.

Another mystery shrouds the song of the hen. Some naturalists state as a proven fact that the hen fights like her swashbuckler of a lord, and sings. Robins' songs vary much in quality, and it may be that the hens sing the feebler songs of autumn when the birds are battling for their winter beats. The duel is always preceded by a vocal contest, and for a long time before blows are struck the garden resounds with the sharp challenging calls, "tsit, tsit."

When in autumn "the Redbreast whistles from the garden croft" there are few to rival the song. We are inexpressibly indebted to the Robin for its autumn music, its requiem of the dying year. It is master-singer of September, as the Mistle-Thrush is of March, and the Nightingale of May, and it has the concert-platform to itself in garden and wood. It gives us more music in autumn than in spring, while there are more minstrels in

the troupe ; the cocks of the year, having discarded their Thrush-like buff spots on the breast and put on red waistcoats, tune up, and Continental Robins may come for the winter. The Robin's song has almost matchless qualities, in the way the notes are dwelt upon, and run into one another, in their plaintiveness and pensiveness, so full of exquisite tenderness, so sweetly modulated. The song seems a sad one, in a minor key, the sweeter for telling of saddest thoughts. It is the song of the falling leaves, and sets to music the feelings and thoughts that come unbidden in the September garden when we look for the last roses, as the melancholy cry of the Partridge in the stubbles is in harmony with the rising of the harvest moon. A deliberate singer, the Robin seems to be pleasing itself with various airs, dwelling so fondly on long-drawn notes, and repeating favourite passages. Where three or four are gathered in a garden, their challenging songs are heard through the autumn day, one singer often waiting for another to finish before it begins. Towards roosting-time, we hear a peculiar call, a melancholy sort of wail or a sorrowful sighing, reminding

us of the lady in the ballad, "She made her sighs to sing."

In nesting days, as in autumn, each pair of Robins likes to possess its own little kingdom, where no stranger Robin is tolerated, but now and then two pairs will chance to nest close together on their frontier line. There were two pairs which elected to build on ledges at opposite corners of a thatched summer-house, scarcely six feet apart, the roof serving for a watershed strictly dividing their spheres of influence. The first egg was laid in either nest on the same morning, but it was not observed that the families ever grew to be on calling terms.

Down the lane, the school children, picking white violets, hit on the secret of a Robin's five eggs in a bank-nest, a perilous site. Within an inch runs the highway of the rats ; the bank harbours grass-snakes, the ditch a hedgehog ; the lane is a haunt of egg-sucking Jays ; and stoats and weasels, like the children, are an ever-present danger. Country people say that cats will not harm Robins, but they pull the young from the nest. The family affairs make a story in three chapters ; twelve days may

go on building the nest—not forgetting a doormat of dead leaves, at the entrance—twelve on hatching, and twelve more on preparing the nestlings to face the world.

A garden nestful of Robins gives a chance to tame the youngsters, and they will quickly become wonderfully familiar. If one person feeds the nestlings daily with scraps of chopped meat, they learn to know their friend, and will become eager to greet him when he passes. In time they will perch fearlessly on an outstretched hand, three or four together, and haply may long continue to be garden pets, and “sacred to the household gods.”

The Robin always sings a song of autumn regardless of the season, but the piping of the Song-Thrush in autumn strikes no melancholy note. It finds life most jolly, and sings in gladsome strain whether at matins or vespers, in shine or shower, in the spring or in the Fall. It seems to take a pride in its artistry, singing slow, then fast, loud, then low, and varying sweetness with harshness; one might think that several birds sang at varying distances.

We lift up our hearts at the song of the Thrush ; it strikes responsive chords. Clear as a bell, yet it is mellow like a Blackbird's whistle. Now it peals forth in a phrase bluff, hearty and homely ; then comes a tender passage. It sings from January onwards, far into summer ; falls silent while moulting ; and in autumn tries to recapture something of its spring rapture. In gardens of great towns, the song of the Thrush in November seems even more arresting than in rural ways. The Cockney Thrush commands a good audience, and its music is doubly welcome when arising from the drab and sooty shrubberies of some city square, in the gloom of a foggy afternoon. While its notes have the charm of variety and surprise, it constantly repeats favourite phrases—he sings each song thrice over—and what appeals to many is the human quality in the fine soprano voice, and the way it seems to fit phrases like “ Shut-the-gate ! ” or “ Pretty Poll,” or “ Wait-a-bit, wait-a-bit ! ” West countrymen hold the Thrush to be “ Queen of Song,” since the capricious Nightingale is rarely heard in their country to challenge the title.

The note of conscious pride in the song sometimes seems to be repeated in the nest which is decorated in an unusual style ; in one story a Thrush hit on the charming adornment of fresh peach-blossoms, and made a picture of pride as she sat within her flowery bower.

The first new song of a new year to be heard in a garden may be to the credit of a Mistle-Thrush, largest and boldest of its tribe. Its task is to challenge winter, and call in spring, and it redeems the dullest day of mid-winter, as it sounds its tocsin from a reeling elm-top. If the Blackbird is the great contralto, the Mistle-Thrush is the unrivalled soprano of the feathered choir. Songs will seem to express what we imagine to be the characters of the singers. The Blackbird's slow and leisurely lay, at times almost furtive, becomes one given to skulking on the ground in shadowy shrubberies. But the song of the Mistle-Thrush is uttered defiantly from the topmost spray of the elm, though tempests rage, and between whiles it makes aggressive attacks on any birds which challenge its mightiness.

In winter it will often elect to live a solitary life, and to take possession of some one holly-bush, and hold it as a fort against all-comers, hence one old name, Holm-Screech. Few dispute its claims to the berries, which seem to be too acrid for the tastes of many birds when sweeter food is to be found. Having made itself at home at the sign of the holly, the Mistle-Thrush will give battle by the hour, morning after morning, to other jealous Thrushes. Directly one drifts to its headquarters, the cock of the tree flies for it like a fury, and then the two chase round in wide circles. As the wrath of the proprietor rises, the attack is pressed home in good earnest; they close; and then may hurtle from the top of the tree, locked together, feathers flying, to the ground. In their frenzy they allow a quiet observer to approach closely, and admire their splendid grey and speckled forms, almost as large and plump as Partridges.

The bird's ordinary title is well-deserved, since it is credited with sowing the seeds of mistletoe on tree-branches, where it sets them while cleaning its bill. A certain pair of Mistle-Thrushes lived up to their title

last spring by building their nest in a spray of mistletoe.

Stormcock is a grand old title too, well deserved, as the birds challenge the voice of a storm on a blustery day of March. After nesting days, they drop from the spring chorus while they roam afield with their families, the parties in autumn forming flocks which lead a gypsy life until the song-season comes again in mid-winter. Roaring March winds quieten many birds, but the Mistle-Thrushes seem to enjoy them as they fling out their wild notes, like "the trumpet of a prophecy," and are little daunted by rain or hail. Most birds are quietened by strong winds; but in soft south-westerly rain Song-Thrush and Blackbird sing on, Jenny-Wren and others; and the Plover, whose name means Rain-fowl, and the Green Woodpecker, have reputations for rejoicing in rain, better deserved perhaps by the Sky-Lark, for it sings on in winter and summer, in rain, snow, sleet or thunder.

Gilbert White remarked that the Mistle-Thrush is a good guard of new-sown peas, since it suffers no Magpie, Jay or Blackbird to enter its garden haunt. But it will

tolerate lesser birds ; close alongside a Mistle-Thrush's nest in a yew we have found the occupied nests of Goldcrest and Chaffinch. If Rooks should settle on a Storm-cock's nest-tree, they will be assailed by wild screeches and a hot attack, and when routed will be pursued perhaps far beyond the garden's frontier.

In the bird chorus of dawn, opened by starshine, when the Wood-Owls are yet tremulously hooting, the main burden is borne by the Blackbirds. The flood of their rich music flows at grandest volume just as the apple-blossom is seen to be flushing pink. Voice after voice arrests the ear for a moment, and is lost in the chorus, the crooning of a Turtle-Dove, the crow of a Pheasant challenging the sun, a sudden outburst from a Wren, a skirl of bagpipes from the Larks, seemingly among the stars—not one song-bird is silent as the sun rises and the Owl, having fulfilled its task of awaking the cocks, goes to roost at daybreak.

Blackbirds and Thrushes have much in common, as becomes cousins, and live on

friendly terms, yet have habits as different as their feathers or their contralto and soprano songs. The Thrush has by far the longer song-season, and sings in hard weather while the Blackbirds withhold their richer lays. The Blackbird has the more stealthy and skulking disposition; yet if annoyed by cat or weasel shows the finer fighting spirit. The Blackbird has been well called the Blackfoot Indian among birds, being given to stealthy stalking in groves where its black feathers merge into black shadows, and its golden bill might pass for an errant beam of sunlight.

The rich, mellow, flute-like notes are eloquent of the best moments of the year. There is something pleasing too, as natural to wintry scenes, in the loud alarm-cackle, and there is something appropriate to dusk in the shrubbery in the "chink, chink" with which the birds call good-night to the world. The freshest, richest song may be deemed to be that of the break of day, as early as half-past two o'clock by what God-fearing country people call God's time. In June, it sings in praise of strawberries, and in mid-September may utter a grace for the peaches of our south wall.

In autumn the Blackbird is tempted to the tops of hedges by the hawthorn-berries, when they are fully ripe and mellowed by frost. Then the black feathers are no longer a camouflage, but are set off finely by the haws. Day after day the same Blackbirds are seen about the same place of feasting, attacking the berries in a very stealthy way, but alert to drive off trespassers, even swooping at the powerful Mistle-Thrush, as if to remind it that it is king of some holly-bush castle of its own. The Blackbirds' crafty and suspicious nature is revealed, if we watch their way of coming to feed at the sign of the hawthorn. One bush in a hedge often proves a favourite, attracting a host of patrons. The Thrush comes like a welcome guest, and helps itself like a favoured patron to whatever bunch of berries comes first to beak. The Mistle-Thrush comes with a rush and fury, like a warrior. But the Blackbird steals in like a thief, by some back or side door as it were, hides behind curtains of the leaves, grabs for a berried spray, and vanishes like a shadow to eat in privacy. Others of the Thrush tribe feed boldly out in mid-meadow. The Blackbird likes to keep close to a hedge.

Until the Nightingale and the Blackcap come in April, the Blackbird holds the stage as the supreme bird singer of early spring, for in some qualities, mellow richness and flutiness, there is no song to compare to its lazy carol. There is no reason to suppose that the older Blackbirds are not mated for life, yet the ritual must never be omitted of fighting other cocks, and singing to charm the brown hen, be she never so faithful. Some Blackbirds are talented as mocking birds, and borrowed Thrush notes may be heard in their roundelays, or Crow notes or Chicken-like cacklings; there is a merry tale of a Blackbird which would crow like a barndoor cock.

The nests of Blackbird and Thrush have a family likeness, but the Blackbird's seems more comfortable with its softer lining, and is more likely to be decorated. Most attractive are the brilliantly green nests of fresh moss common in dank and mossy shrubberies. Nests almost wholly composed of brown bracken would be perfectly hidden if set amidst bracken, but are obvious when built against a tree-trunk. A remarkable example of ornament was

seen in a nest completely covered outwardly with yellow hazel-catkins. She may be the wisest Blackbird who avoids evergreen shrubs and sets a plain brown nest in a bare brown hedge, where her own quiet brown feathers are in harmony with surroundings.

The demand of Aristophanes,

One question answer in the fewest words,
What sort of life is it among the birds ?

would surely be met on a bright March morning by the answer, it is a joyous life. The choir is still select (Thrush, Blackbird, Starling, Robin, Wood-Pigeon, Hedge-Sparrow, Lark, Great Titmouse, Wren, etc.) yet it were hard to say which minstrel's song excels in the happy spirit. Chaffinch and Wren sing in rollicking style; the Starling is the troop's jester. The Song-Thrush, exclamatory and inquisitive,—with its perpetual, “Judy! Judy! Po-peep! Bo-peep! How d'ye do? How d'ye do?”—seems to find it hardest to express its good spirits at seven of a March morning. The Blackbird sings calmly and serenely, and its song seems to express, as Gilbert

White said of the chirping of crickets, everything that is rural, verdurous and joyous.

The most modest, the gentlest and in many ways among the best-loved of garden birds is the Hedge-Sparrow. Its occasional winter song goes to show, as an old time naturalist said well, that an even and quiet temper can best bear the adversities of this life. The bird is a favourite for its very quietness, for its retiring yet not shy disposition, and its neat and sober dress in keeping with its deportment, as well as for the sky-blueness of its eggs, and its unpretending lay. It is a proof of affection if a bird bears many names, and the Hedge-Sparrow has several which are fitter than its proper ones, ill-becoming a warbler singing lyrics with sweet, swift notes gliding into one another. Hedge-Chanter suits it well, and rings more pleasantly than Hedge-Accentor ; Dunnock is an approved name, and Shuffewing is appropriate to the pretty play of the wings in courting days. One can never pass a Hedge-Sparrow's nest without a new thrill

of delight when there are sky-blue eggs in the mossy cup.

Birds look up and behold your king,
Great of soul, though a tiny thing.

Nut-brown Jenny-Wren is the garden's sentinel, greeting all trespassers with notes like a watchman's wooden rattle. Because of its habit of hopping in and out of holes and caves, of banks, stone walls or faggot-piles, it has earned its remarkable name, *Troglodytes*; it is a great lover of the stone hedges of the west country, where it is as common as blackberries, and never tires of playing hide-and-seek among the stones. The good-will of all men goes out to Jenny-Wren. Its dapper form, scarcely larger than a walnut, its briskness and pertness, appeal to the eye, and it charms us by the loudness and gaiety of its ringing, trilling songs, like merriest laughter, uttered to cheer us on wintry days as heartily as in spring, and even in snow, a song of wonderful power, considering the midget size of the singer, and tirelessly repeated.

No bird has a stronger nesting instinct, or what we may describe as a greater idea

of comfort. An opportunist, the Wren is content with all sorts of material for its large, warm, domed nest, normally built of twigs, roots, leaves and moss, stuffed with feathers. All sorts of positions serve, the side of a tree, the thatch of a hut, the ivy of a stream's bridge, or any arch of brick where a brick is missing. Where one nest is found, three or four others may commonly be seen nearby, called by countrymen cocks' nests. In view of the midget size of the architects, these are ambitious nests, with a neat small entrance-hole, and with a remarkable firmly-plaited doorstep. Unlined nests are possibly the cocks' nests, and may be used at some time as nurseries. Certainly the cock builds as well as the hen, and while building, sings. When roosting-time comes, there is a prodigious bustle and chatter when Wrens retire to their nests, especially in winter when parties roost together in holes in the sides of hayricks, or in thatch or in old nests, huddling for warmth. Twenty or more, birds of different families, may roost in one hole. If driven out, but not too seriously frightened, they will quickly return, with indignant chattering.

The Wren seems peculiarly adapted for slipping easily through tangled places in a mouse-like way. The inner side of the short and rounded wing is curiously concave, closely fitting the body's curve, while the short tail is soft and flexible, allowing a swift and easy turn. On a miniature scale, the Wren is built on the lines of a wading-bird, rather than on those of a percher, and it has the Wader's habit of up-cocking the tail, as if to keep it dry, while walking.

Old stories tell of cruel persecutions suffered by the Wren ; yet no doubt it has often been protected, as by a shield, by the power of an old north-country distich :

Malisons, malisons, mair than ten,
Who harries the Queen of Heaven's Wren.

In spring, and sometimes in autumn, one Wren's roundelay sets a rival singing, and then begins in a long-continued musical duel, each bird courteously waiting for the other to finish its song before repeating it, note for note and trill for trill.

It were hard to say which is the first true song of spring, since Thrush and Blackbird,

Wren, Hedge-Sparrow and Redbreast uplift their voices in mid-winter. The place of honour would be given by some to the first song of the Chaffinch, or the first notes of the Chiffchaff as it calls its name to the woods on a day of March. The Mistle-Thrush, rarely piping, has earned the name, Spring's trumpeter. The Great Titmouse might be called Spring's bellman. The ringing notes are a greater edition of the Chiffchaff's, and are variously compared to the sound of a file sharpening a saw, that of a whetstone on a scythe, or to the ringing of a bell clamorous for the rise of spring's curtain. Next to the Mistle-Thrush's trumpet-calls, no bird-note is more dominant or cheerful in February and March than the Great Titmouse's. Perhaps it was from the repetition of the two ringing notes, low and high in succession, that the bird earned the name Oxeye, which the notes suggest. It is well named Great, being the greatest of the Titmouse tribe in size, strength and vigour ; from the powerful blows it delivers with its bill when attacking nuts or chiselling at wood it has a provincial name, Hackmall, and a pleasant familiar name in Black-headed Bob.

Those who feed a rout of Titmice in gardens observe how they gain over woodland brethren in plumpness and glossiness of feather, as the care-free London Pigeons become such mammoth birds, and rich faring makes the Pheasant one of the most glorious objects in nature. When fed sumptuously on nuts, the Great Titmouse seems to become ever more resplendent in its primrose waistcoat with the broad black stripe. With its mate (known by sporting a narrower blue-black breast-stripe than her lord's) it does much to make up for lacking colour in a drear December garden.

The Redbreast no doubt is first favourite among our garden birds of winter, because of the red of its waistcoat, its pertness, its winter lyrics, and its friendliness—so cheerily it hops about the banquet-table of a patron, or, in his working-hours, perches on the writing-desk, even on the moving pen. Billy-Biter, the Blue Titmouse, comes near to Bobbie as a winter favourite, being so easily lured to gardens, and held in attendance as long as there

shall be cocoanuts. The name, Billy-Biter, was earned by the bird's boldness, in defence of its nest, and the way the sitting bird hisses and pecks at the hand of a despoiler. The Blue Titmouse is seen to highest advantage when playing about a holly-tree, or some sombre yew, the dark leaves finely setting off its smart new winter costume in yellow and blue.

When Titmice haunt some "Sign of the Cocoanut" in a bird-lover's garden their marvellous vigilance is well observed. After each beakful of food, the head and eyes must be turned to look out for danger. Blue Titmice will turn the head completely round, to look before and after. When feeding upside down, the head is turned every second so that the eyes glance directly to the ground. If a small hole be cut in the side of a cocoanut, the Blue Titmouse delights to go inside to feed, but its little wise-looking, Owl-like face for ever pops out of the hole, lest it should be taken unawares. The advantage of this vigilance is seen if it should come to pass that a Sparrow-Hawk flashes upon a feeding party as they play about the cocoanut, and every little Tit zigzags serenely out of the way,

and in a few seconds all—let us hope—are at their junketing again.

After nesting-days, the parents introduce their young to their hostelry, this “Sign of the Cocconut” where the old birds may be feeding with scarcely any intermission from late to early summer. The little ones’ first essays at acrobatic tricks are ludicrous enough, and they no sooner flutter to cling to the nut than they fall off. Later, merry, restless, noisy parties of Titmouse families make a delightful feature of the garden’s shrubberies. In their different coats of many colours, the birds make up a harlequin band—Oxeyes, in deep purple-black and primrose yellow, Blue Titmice in paler blue and primrose, the black-capped Marsh-Titmouse, which loves woods in autumn better than marshes, and the Long-tailed Titmice, in grey and rose, whose flight suggests arrows. Birds outside the clan are attracted to the party, especially Goldcrests ; also another blue bird, the Nuthatch, and that feathered mouse, the sober, industrious Tree-Creeper. Beechmast is a high attraction to the rovers ; and in pine-woods it is a charming thing to see the Coal-Titmice swinging on the cones.

Though a devoted lover of pine-woods, the Coal-Titmouse is easily lured to gardens and made semi-tame by suitable offerings of food. In the wilds it is perhaps more commonly observed in winter than summer. The curious name, sometimes rendered as "Colemouse," is derived perhaps from its coal-black head, set off by the patch of white on the nape, the badge of the clan, notable on the young as soon as they are feathered.

A group of these tiny gymnasts makes an arresting study in wintry woods, as they flutter about the pines, spreading out over all the branches, hanging upside-down, and uttering incessantly their "zit-zat" notes. With no obvious cause, all suddenly flit from one tree to another, as if obedient to a leader's word of command. They follow the traditions of the Blue Titmouse, believing in perpetual motion in search of food, and in the minute examination of any one bough, which must be regarded from all points of view, sides and undersides as well as top. Sociable birds, they join forces in the woods with other small tree-haunters, Goldcrests and Lesser Redpolls, uttering, as they voyage on fluttering

flight, their cheeping notes. Like the Blue Titmouse, when the Coal-Titmouse is in its nest, in a hole in tree or wall, possibly in a mouse-hole, it hisses if disturbed. Its pleasing ditty of spring is faintly echoed in the syllables, "che-chee, che-chee."

Most confiding of its tribe is the Marsh-Titmouse, a delightful little bird which readily submits itself to bird-charmer's arts, and will make itself at home on the table of a quiet writer, when lured by food from window-sill to study. Besides wearing no white mark on the nape of the neck, it is distinguished from the Coal-Titmouse by lacking spots on the wing-coverts, and its call-note is distinctive; there is a pleasing little spring song, faintly suggested by a rapid repetition of the syllables, "if-he, if-he!" It is true to Titmouse type in its pretty motions, and in devoting most of its days, as it seems, to the hunting of insects, for we rarely see any Titmouse otherwise engaged than in hunting and eating. Little parties of Marsh-Titmice seen in autumn, seven or

eight strong, suggest family parties. Though not especially devoted to marshes, they are often seen in alders and willows by streams, and like to nest in an old willow's hole, though they will themselves dig out holes in old stumps or trunks.

We may apply to the Pied Wagtail a saying about a mulberry-tree on a lawn, that it is a patent of nobility to a garden. While these Wagtails are renowned travellers, some pairs elect to settle for a great part of the year in a garden, or in a yard where insects abound, where they become familiar objects, since few small birds are more conspicuous when set against a plain background: the black and white colour scheme is as bold as a Magpie's. Lively and graceful birds, their movements suggest dancing, and they run, glide, and swerve as smoothly over clods behind a plough as on lawn or terrace, and never cease to flirt their tails. As they dart about in their erratic way, and fly with dipping motion on short voyages, they seem governed by an endless series of wayward impulses. By nature they would seem to

be water-sprites, at home by the margins of pools and streams, yet they will make their dainty selves at home in a kitchen garden or courtyard, or will dance about among the feet of grazing cattle or in autumn over sea-shore sea-weed. That this Wagtail is associated with water is a clue to its odd country name, Dish-washer, perhaps a contraction of Ditch-watcher, which becomes it well ; though it has been noted how there is a suggestion of old women in black and white, washing clothes by a stream, in the Wagtail's costume and its jerky movements at a ditch's side.

The autumn moult makes a notable difference in the bird's spruce attire, since it loses the black gorget which adorns the throat in summer, and in other respects varies the Magpie-like colour-scheme. The Continental variety of our Pied Wagtail, the so-called White Wagtail—a passing spring visitor to our shores—has similar plumage (but a grey mantle and rump), and is as curiously ill-named as our Grey Wagtail of the streams, whose canary-yellow hues make it the most beautiful of our three feathered graces.

A devoted lover of a garden lawn, from mid-May until September, is the Spotted Flycatcher. No bird comes more faithfully back, summer after summer, to the same garden, arriving late, in mid-May, and nesting in a creeper against the house-wall, or on a beam, hence the name, Beam-bird. A tennis-lawn net, or a croquet hoop, it makes into a watch-tower whence to launch itself on short, fly-fishing excursions, "to comprehend all vagroms." To a quiet pleasure-lawn the constant clicking of its beak on fly or bee brings a sense of the sternness of life, as if the garden harboured a miniature hawk or dragon. As Gilbert White said, it is "the most mute" of our summer birds, and it seems to have no time for idle singing during its short sojourn. Like the Spotted Eagle, it takes its English specific name from the spots on the young birds' plumage.

Honoured is the garden to which a Redstart flies in spring from overseas, to nest in some favourite hole in tree or wall, for choice in the stones of a ruined wall: a bird of ruins and rocks. The sight of the

eggs thrills the beholder as the Hedge-Sparrow's eggs never fail to enchant, being like the Hedge-Sparrow's, but perhaps better described as apple-green than sparrow-blue. So the bird gladdens the eye, with its tail of fire, which it is never tired of flirting, as if it knows its beauty. The browns, reds and greys of the plumage, the white forehead, the black of the chin and throat, are all pure and pretty colours. (The hen lacks the bright colours, but flirts a chestnut tail.) And the ear is charmed by the prettiness of the song, reminiscent of a Whitethroat's. It is attuned to the days of the cream of May. The few warbled notes are delivered usually from a tree with few breaks from morn till eve. Like all the Warblers, the Redstart is restless, sudden in action, and lively in disposition.

To gardens with cherry-trees comes the shy Hawfinch, which delights to nest in an orchard. A rare and delightful bird-picture is made in autumn by a flock of these elusive birds feeding on hawthorn-berries. Though always crafty at keeping their fine

feathers out of sight, they are well seen in autumn as they attack the fruits of old hedgerows, haunting crab-apples, or feasting on bullaces and sloes. At the first glimpse of an intruder the Hawfinch jerks to cover, or is over the hedge and away. But there is no mistaking the handsome, reddish-brown form, the large head and thick neck, black wings and parrot-like bill. The kernels of the haws tempt it, like the stones of the cherry, which it splits as if with a chisel, and it is a lover of beechmast, the seeds of fir-cones and hornbeams, hazel-nuts—and green peas. The quieter the grove, the denser and darker, the better it suits this handsome Finch. Few small birds are more wary or shy of meeting man's eye, and few are more silent, though its presence may be detected at times by its low twittering.

A setting of flowers may add much to our delight in a bird's song, as when a Blackcap or a Garden-Warbler sings on a cherry-tree in full blossom. While the Garden-Warbler has no special devotion to gardens, it will often make one musical the

day long by its presence, and it may elect to nest in a gooseberry bush or rose. The song has much in common with the Blackcap's (as have the nest and eggs), and for what little it may lack in richness of tone it makes amends by its long continuance—Pettichaps, as old-time naturalists named the minstrel, sings by the hour.

In autumn, the garden's House-Sparrow often causes amusement by building nests in trees, in the House-Martins' nest, or in a nesting-box. Some birds seem inspired by spring fever in autumn, as when Rooks and Grouse give displays of courting rites, but the Sparrow's idea in nesting may be, like the badger's, to make a snug winter dormitory. A pair which occupy any little chalet of a nesting-box will show the utmost pride in their feather-lined nest, and will give a rough welcome to any bird which ventures to pay a call. So Wrens (mice too) seek nests as roosting-places, while the Moorhen as evening falls shepherds her flock of chicks from the water to put them to bed in the old cradle.

In the Deer Park

No bird in the park attracts more attention to itself than the Jay. Ever alert, it likes to know about all that goes on, and then advertises its discoveries with one of the harshest bird voices in nature, often described as like the rending of calico. To walk in a Jay-haunted glade is to be proclaimed by loud screams all the way. Discordant as they are, they please as a token that the Jay holds its own against bitter persecution, brought upon itself by egg-stealing. It gives the alarm to all the wood when a fox steals across a ride, and this may tell a huntsman which way his fox has gone. Small birds in turn betray the Jay by their clamour.

The harshness of the screech and the coarseness of the chatter are in strong contrast to the attractive plumage, especially when glistening in sunlight, and the marvel of the blue on the wings. The crest, greyish-white, black-streaked, tinged at the end with purplish-red, adds much to the lively appearance, and seems to express

every passing mood, surprise, fear, anger, or maybe pleasure. And the eye is taken by the broad streaks of black running back from the bill, like moustaches, and, when the bird flies, by the white feathers displayed on the lower part of the back. In shape and bearing, in the expression of the eye and head, the Jay is the incarnation of all that is saucy, inquisitive, and mischievous, and it seems natural that it should be an arch mimic.

The Jay has justly earned the name *Garrulus*—one that will be for ever prattling, babbling and tattling—but when nesting it makes a remarkable change of habit. From summer to spring it is one of the noisiest birds, for ever uttering its startling “wrak, wrak” call, or mimicking other sounds, bleating like a lamb, barking, mewling, neighing, calling like a Buzzard, or hitting off the soft courting note of the Brown Owl. When nesting it falls silent, becoming one of our stealthiest and shyest birds, as with crafty eye it watches a wayfarer’s every movement. If it be heard in spring uttering a sort of song in a soft and pleasant manner, the notes are so low that we doubt if they were intended for

more than one pair of ears. Disturbed at the nest, the parents are thrown into a frenzy of agitation, flying round with menacing chatter, even in their fury biting at twigs and leaves. The young are remarkably silent while in the nest.

In some of our parks and woodlands there has been an increase of Jays in our time, partly due to the Great War which sent gamekeepers to shoot in other fields, and brought about a sort of golden age to many creatures they are pleased to call "varmint."

The Magpie, with its lustrous green and black and white feathers, cuts a splendid figure when lighted by sunshine, and we may feel the same pity for the handsome bird as for the Jay, in that it brings persecution on its head by its habit of sucking eggs. When it is feeding on the greensward of the park we may observe how, like some other birds, it carries its long tail high, to keep it from dragging in the wet. The Magpie is the supreme architect among the Crows, and has improved on the Crow's pattern of a nest

by adding a great dome and fortifying the whole with thorns. "Madge" seems to trust to the strength of her nest to defy her enemies, for it is visible from afar. It is truly a fortress, a vast affair of sticks strongly cemented with mud, lined with roots and grasses, and protected by loose thorn-sticks forming an impenetrable palisade: in their way, Magpies are as notable architects as the Long-tailed Titmice. At the nest's side is a small, secret loop-hole, through which Madge glides like a shadow. Quietly to listen to the guttural chattering of a party of Magpies is a rare entertainment, as they seem to recount their thefts and mischiefs of the day.

In Norway, Magpies commonly build near houses, and are protected as harbingers of good fortune.

Most amusing of all the birds in the park is the Jackdaw. Bird-loving Bishop Stanley happily hit off the character of this merry rogue: "Wherever found, he is the same active, cheerful, noisy fellow. He seems to know neither care nor sorrow

—ever satisfied—always happy ! Who ever heard of a moping, melancholy Jackdaw ? ” It seems to revel in an aërial gambol, to float on the wind, dive and soar, or chase another, with sharp yelping notes. It has been called “ the ecclesiastical daw,” from an age-old association with the churches wherein it delights to nest, but as the poet sang, it has acquired no odour of sanctity :

The Daw’s not reckoned a religious bird
Because he keeps a-cawing from a steeple.

The farmer’s wife is fearful for her chicks when she spies Jackie-Dorrie, as her children call the rascal. No doubt it has an eye for Pheasants’ eggs. Yet it is a general favourite, a sociable bird, loquacious, pert and sprightly, a sort of buffoon among the Crows, a bird with a saucy, cunning expression. It struts about among its friends the Rooks with a careless, jaunty air, and it is pleasant to hear its shrill barking among their deeper caws.

Among many sterling qualities, it is a devoted mate. It is supposed to pair for life, and this is saying much if it be true that it may live to be a hundred years

old. When courting, it makes display by soaring high into the air, and sailing about, mounting in spirals, almost in the way of an Eagle. Nesting later than the Rooks, it enjoys a long courtship through all the spring.

Like the Starling, it is a lover of a walnut-tree, and one or two old walnuts with attractive holes will give sanctuary for a dozen pairs. It is one of the most intelligent of Crows, our most intelligent birds.

There is more beauty in a Jackdaw than its portraits in bird-books suggest; the painter's brush seems defied by its glossy black cap, the silvery-grey nape of the neck, and the quality of the contrasting black of the back, and the shining black of the legs, as by the droll expression of a half-turned head, and the knowing look in the bluish-white eye.

Nesting in a hollow tree in the park, a pair of Jackdaws will stuff their chosen cavity with enough sticks and rubbish to fill a cart. A collection of twigs makes a foundation, to be lined with grass or straw, and with an inner lining of wool, sometimes of feathers, whereon the handsome eggs, bluish-white, speckled with

browns and greyish under-markings, are laid in mid-May.

The Jackdaw proclaims the first syllable of its name, pronouncing it as "chock," with a staccato ending, and calls the note in a quaintly quick fashion when flying at speed, chasing another; the flight is swifter than the Rook's, as may be seen when Jackdaws consort with a rookery, as is their delight.

An old chalk-pit in the side of the South Downs is the haunt of hundreds of Daws, and in late summer the cliff of chalk resounds with their wild babel as old and young birds hold revel in the air. When they descend, they like to perch in a line on the edge of the pit's summit, in a way reminiscent of gulls. No animal could climb far up the cliff to molest them, though rabbits mount some distance, and are followed by stoats, and there is a fox-hole in the cliff at the height of a man's head. Among the Daws nests a Kestrel, raising a high commotion at its every entrance and exit.

Country people say that the wedding-day

of the Rooks is St. Valentine's Day. All through the winter until that time they have proved their strong attachment for their old homes, visiting the nest-trees, as if to make sure that the old eyries are holding together through winter storms, and to discuss repairs and new works. Certain pairs, old inhabitants perhaps, jealously guard some of the nests, and much skirmishing goes on as they drive off others. As White of Selborne truly remarked of Rooks in winter, they get their livelihood very easily; otherwise they would not spend so much time over the old nests which, we suppose, are chiefly of sentimental interest. Having assembled at the nest-trees as dusk falls, they presently fly on to their winter roosting-quarters.

St. Valentine duly marrying the birds, the nest-building begins. Often it is pushed on with frantic haste, so that the walls of a nest will be built up in two or three days, but if the weather is bad the work may be delayed. Rooks are conservatives, and opposed to new departures, as young Rooks find which have a fancy for nesting apart from the colony. Should a pair set up house-keeping in an elm a quarter of a

mile distant, the fathers of the colony presently assemble at their tree, and hold a high argument about the experiment. They may disperse in peace, but possibly will reverse their decision to sanction the departure, and a day comes when a sudden attack is made on the outlying nest by the whole force of the rookery, and within five or six minutes it is demolished, and not one stick is left upon another.

The business-like way in which some pairs work at an old nest suggests they are old hands at the task, and neophytes may be discovered by clumsy attempts at building, which the old birds may ruthlessly destroy. It may not be until about the second week of March when the birds occupy their spring home, roosting in the nest-trees at night. They decide to roost when the great nests, two or three feet across, are finished, possibly delaying until the first egg is laid. Before this time we see the birds' anxiety made manifest lest their sticks shall be stolen, especially when setting sail for the roost-trees; a cunning rogue may then linger behind on the chance of loot, or one is seen sneaking back after the flock has sailed, desperately to steal a

few sticks. Any petty pilfering which does go on seems a small thing besides the devotion of a Rook pair for each other, and their complete devotion to their young ; in many ways they are "lovely and pleasant in their lives." Courting rites are never neglected, though a pair of birds may have been faithful partners for twenty years. The Rook in love cuts a ridiculous figure, as it bows and scrapes before the fair enchanter in the elm-top, with bows more vigorous than elegant, while the accompanying caws no doubt speaks volumes. The hen may prove coy, and may enjoy leading a train of courtiers for a pretty dance : such affairs must pleasantly pass the time until the trials of house-keeping begin. Even then the master of the family proves a gallant lover, and has the charming habit of popping food into its mate's bill, and continues to do so while she is sitting, in due time, on the eggs ; while she makes a show of affection, fluttering her wings on her lord's approach, and uttering tremulous cries, like a nestling.

Thomas Carlyle was of opinion that " to hold a dialogue with a rookery " was the best expression for the most utter confusion

and bewilderment, yet it is a pleasure and amusement to listen to the confabulations of the Rooks in the reeling elm-tops in nesting-days, in harmony somehow with the spirit of the old deer-park, and as White of Selborne said, there is something "very engaging to the imagination" in the confused cawing of a distant flock as it returns from the foraging of the day, wheels and sports and dives with a cawing not unlike the cry of a pack of hounds in hollow, echoing woods. (He remarked also: "Rooks, in the breeding season, attempt sometimes, in the gaiety of their hearts, to sing, but with no great success.")

"A-listening the Linnet" was one of the pleasing occupations of one of the many heroines of Bobbie Burns; a-listening the Rook is pleasing too on an April day, as we try, at the sign of the clanging rookery, to make out the meaning of the different caws—those for chiding the young, for greeting a partner on its return with food, or upbraiding the stick-thief. A shrill, treble cawing tells of hungry youngsters safely out of the shells.

Through the year the Rooks follow a more or less set time-table. On a January

morning or evening a countryman can tell the time by seeing a contingent flying from or to the roosting-place. The inward procession may flow along an aërial highway five miles long. As flock upon flock comes in, their cawing in the wood surges ever louder as darkness falls and they quarrel, if not as Washington Irving thought, over the corners of their blankets, about twigs for perches.

Certain birds the Rooks regard as traditional foes, others as friends, like Jackdaws and Starlings. Should a Heron fly over the Rookery there is an instant hue and cry. Several Rooks set off in chase, and easily overtake their majestic quarry, flying above, below and ahead in a threatening way. The Heron will cry pitifully, lose its calm dignity, and assume despairing attitudes. Rooks have been known to expel Herons from their heronry. A Heron may pass near a rookery every day as it returns from its fishing, and at every passing it will be attacked.

So a Kestrel, hovering about the fields for mice or beetles, seems to annoy any Rooks, though they have nothing to fear; they attack fiercely, flying at the hovering

form with a rare turn of speed, swinging finely aloft to gain an advantage in position, swooping to swing aloft and dive again. The Kestrel keeps calm. Easily outflying the Rooks, hot though the chase may be, it seems to hold them in contemptuous disdain.

A few animals are dangerous to Rooks. The young often fall from their nests, and may be picked up by foxes. When Rooks are feeding on the ground, they may be attacked by stoat or weasel.

A return of spring fever appears to assail Rooks in the early Autumn. When feeding on the ground, the flock may be seen to go in pairs. Even when seriously flying on their lawful occasions, one may be observed to toy with another on the wing, with sentimental cawing.

As the bats come forth, and it is time to go to roost, a wild spirit may be let loose among them, and then we see the mysterious ritual of their evening evolutions. High above the trees the flock circles, some flying one way, some another, so that the effect is the cutting of a figure of eight; they spire, float, and suddenly dive, like thunderbolts, flying almost with the ease of Swallows, and with a wild clangour.

When Rooks are thus seen wheeling madly, and diving as if to dash themselves to pieces on the ground, righting themselves at the last moment to soar and dive again, countrymen expect gales of wind and storms. In an autumn gale the line comes to mind, "The Rooks are blown about the skies." Their mellow calling seems in tune with the last mellow leaves, and the golden evening light.

The old park may haply be endowed with a herony. There is a legend that no birds ever build, or sing their happy songs, in the evergreen oak-tree ; but in one Sussex park a heronry has been founded on those oaks. The great birds delight to perch motionless, or swaying in the wind, on topmost sprays, and it is a striking picture the wading birds make, thus perched on high. In the grey light of dawn they look like graven images—a village child suggested the comparison to surpliced choir-boys—and at sundown their ghostly-grey forms are suffused in roseate hues, and then they suggest flame-coloured Flamingoes, and their bills shine like gold daggers.

It had been well said that if a stag, Peacock, and a hound could be tethered high in an oak, and the stag were to issue his challenging roar, the Peacock to scream, and the hound to bay, a babel might be produced to suggest the uproar made by nesting Herons. The harsh, cracked cries of the nest-builders are succeeded by extraordinary sounds arising when the parents bring home fish for the nestlings. The return of one is a signal to set all young ones in all nests croaking, hissing, grunting, squealing and quacking. A young Heron is so ludicrous a bird, with its heavy head, tufted like a Skye terrier's, its gaping mouth, staring eyes, writhing neck, and naked body, it seems impossible that in two years it may be guarding a nest of its own, poising nobly in the tree-top as upright as a Falcon.

One high, reiterated note which might be a Kestrel's—penetrating, elusive, mocking—faintly expressed by *Puy-puy-puy*!—announces to all and sundry in the park that the Cuckoo is coming—the voice of the Cuckoo's boder or herald, the Wryneck.

The bird is more often heard than viewed in the act of twisting and turning its snake-like head. It has a marvellous gift of elusiveness, since its mottled form, chequered like a fritillary's wings, blends perfectly with the bark of the trees it haunts, and its voice is somewhat ventriloquistic. This is one of our most mysterious birds, and its call is one of the most welcome in "the untaught harmony of spring."

Country children know the voice, and answer back the high note as they look up from their primrosing. Some may know the boder as Snake-bird, from the way it hisses, with writhing neck, if disturbed on the nest. There is a suggestion of a snake's scales in the colour-scheme of the quiet greys and browns of the elegantly pencilled plumage. It is known too as Emmet-hunter, from its habit of attacking ant's-nests: one marvels to watch the long tongue flicking out, like silver lightning, and in with cocoons.

A favourite perch is a dead tree-branch. Unlike the Tree-Creeper and the Woodpecker, it does not use its tail as a prop, and when exploring trees for insects

and grubs in the bark, its habit is to run along the branches : it is rather a percher than a climber. Year by year the Wryneck returns from overseas faithfully to the same woodland haunt, even to the nest-hole it has known for years, wherein are laid eight or nine eggs or more of a pure shining white. The young birds hiss in their nests with the vigour of their parents. When a courtier, the Wryneck may be heard to utter a peculiarly soft note.

The fourteenth day of April has the old name in Sussex, "First Cuckoo-Day," since on that day the "plain-song Cuckoo grey" should be shouting its name to the Sussex Downs, as it drifts in from the Channel. Drifting down into the Weald, it lands on a tree, and swings itself round and round again, calling the while, with outspread tail, as if to make itself the more conspicuous. Its resemblance to the Sparrow-Hawk is marked : is it an advantage to the Cuckoo that it scares intended dupes by its sinister guise ?

In May, the Cuckoo "sings all day," never with more contentment than after a

shower : country people remark, " It likes a drop to sweeten its whistle." The wandering voice is rarely heard after Midsummer Day, and the old Cuckoos stay with us scarcely longer than two months. With good reason it is believed that the females are polyandrous, and certainly three or more males may be seen in early spring in pursuit of one female whose sex is betrayed by her long-drawn, bubbling note. The habit of the young Cuckoo in ejecting from its nest any other birds within must be a deep-seated instinct, for when it happens that two Cuckoos are hatched in one nest, the stronger throws out its brother. Though through ages hard words have been said on the Cuckoo's character, it is held in real affection by many country people, as is reflected in the rustic rhyme,

The Cuckoo is a pretty bird, he sing as he fly,
He bring us good tidings, and tell us no lie.

The Pheasant is the feathered lord of the squire's manor. There is no prouder bird than the crafty old cock which has reached once more the safe haven of February.

Through the winter the cocks wore long faces, and were the most artful of dodgers, but in February their faces began to glow as redly as the rising sun. Boldly showing themselves, they crow defiantly at the keeper, who finds five cocks in a spinney which he believed sheltered but one.

In the days of sweet violets, the Pheasant selects a seraglio of eight or ten hens, and the proud bird makes a glorious picture in the park when swaggering along with crimson cheeks aglow, crowing challenges, or with wings spread and tail elevated and head carried low, advancing to a duel, fencing for an opening for beak and spurs.

It is in accordance with the Pheasant's complex character—the mingling therein of superb swagger and craftiest cunning—that it should be among the few birds holding aloof from nursery affairs, and their attendant perils. But in the early nesting days, my lord may keep in fairly close attendance on the harem, quietly paying calls on the nesters, announced by a peculiar sort of crow. When they leave their nests for an airing, the proud cock condescends to feed awhile among the unassuming hens. In other ways the cock

does a little something for the hens and their broods, possibly as much as is wise having regard to personal safety ; " He is a rare tipster," the gamekeeper will say, since the Pheasant is always ready to give the alarm on spying cat or fox. The keeper knows by the various notes, the " cock-up " crow, and the whispered warning, " chivet—chivet," what the Pheasant is thinking about. Though cocks desert hens at hatching-time, they may know the whereabouts of the broods, and act as lookers-out to the young birds. In autumn and winter young cocks and old tend to keep together, until March brings the appointed time for swaggering before the hens.

In autumn, the cock Pheasants give a perfecting touch to the park glowing with autumn fires. See three or four fine Pheasants swaggering through a beechen glade, over a drift of fallen leaves of bronze, under a canopy which shines like gold, with the sun lighting up their glittering, emerald necks and bejewelled breasts—they seem the most splendid of British birds.

As dusk falls on the park, the Pheasants

begin to go to roost, and the demesne rings with the ritual of their vespers. Young cocks now feel their self-importance, and lustily answer the challenges of the old birds, and for a spell the hush of still autumn evenings is broken by the babel of their evensong. The strange "cocketing" as the birds flutter into the branches has a wildness which seems to belong to the primeval forest, and in this is akin to the sharp yapping of foxes and the screechings of vixens in wintry woods. The Pheasants' crowing at roosting-time seems like a derisive challenge to the fox.

Lightly-spread rings of feathers on the greensward of the park give daily evidence of the presence of a Sparrow-Hawk. Often they are Finch feathers, sometimes those of a Thrush, occasionally of a Wood-Pigeon or a Partridge; the keeper may have a story of a cock Pheasant which a Sparrow-Hawk knocked from its perch. The feathered Ishmaelite is a pattern of fierceness and determination, and the hen is fiercer than her smaller lord. They

hunt by skimming low to the ground, rising for a rise and falling as the ground dips, following every twist and turn of their prey through densest jungles, and flashing through gaps and round corners. Full of craft, they attack their prey from all manner of ambuscades, and they drop like thunderbolts among small birds as they feed. There is little hope for the hunted bird, but sometimes it finds refuge where the Hawk dare not follow, at the feet of a man. In a story told by a gardener, he was at work in a greenhouse, when a Blackbird flew in at speed, and settled beside him, and then a Sparrow-Hawk hurtled through the glass roof, to fall dead from the shock on top of the Blackbird. A gamekeeper tells a story in honour of a pair of Partridges in deadly peril from a Sparrow-Hawk in time of snow. There was a long, stern chase. Suddenly the leading Partridge swerved from its course, and plunged headlong into a snowdrift, followed by its mate, and the snow swallowed them completely. The Hawk, sprayed and blinded by the snow which rose from the drift as the birds shot in, sheered away.

On a showery day on the threshold of spring the loud and often startling cry of that notorious rain-fowl, the Green Woodpecker, is a cheerful note, and it is a cheering thing on a dull day to see its gay green coat and crimson crown. It looks like some gorgeous tropical bird, and deserves the name, Popinjay, and the voice might have come from the tropics to the quiet English park. The rich green of the back sets off the daring pure yellow of the rump. This primrose patch is seen to effect when the bird is in the act of entering its nest-hole—which it reaches by descending the tree-trunk with a retrograde movement: the patch curiously breaks the typical form at that moment of its defencelessness, when the head is within the hole and the tail without, and the bird might be no more than a yellow leaf, or a splash of sunlight. Perhaps the brilliant crimson head (of black, red-tipped feathers, a partial crest) is a camouflaging touch too, serving to distract the eye from the whole form. About the eyes, in contrast to the red, are black streaks, and crimson black-bordered streaks on the side of the throat give a moustache-like effect.

When the colours may not be distinguished, in flight the bird is known from afar by its curiously undulating progress. A slow, heavy voyager, it rarely flies far. Its element is the tree rather than the air, as its feet proclaim, with two toes in front, and two behind (like a Parrot's) very strong, the claws hooked, the toes rough below. Up the tree it climbs spirally from the base as it prys for insects, and hammers for them with a wedged-shaped beak, supporting itself, as on a footstool, by the strong, stumpy tail. The long, glutinous tongue is seen as a streak of molten silver as it attacks an ant's-nest, and this barbed tongue flashes forth and back with dazzling swiftness. On the ground, the bird seems somewhat uneasy, hopping in an awkward way.

A new nest-hole is discovered by the sign of chips of excavated wood about a tree's roots. It will probably be in a decaying trunk, a circular hole cut by the chisel of a beak, less than three inches across, and running horizontally till soft wood is reached, where a cup for the eggs is fashioned, the five or six eggs of beautiful shining white. In one record the work of

excavating a hole started soon after day-break on a Friday, when the hen bird was observed to be picking off, and flying away with, small round chips of bark. With her mate she laboured incessantly at the hole, and by early on the following Sunday morning the first egg was laid at the end of a tunnel some eight inches long.

It puts one in tune with a day at the dawn of spring to hear the Green Woodpecker's sudden, startling, exultant laughing call, a gladsome "hurrah!"—"Yaffa, yaffa, yaffle," the cry which suggested the countryman's name, Yaffle.

Our smartest tree-climber is perhaps the Great Spotted Woodpecker, a bird rarely seen, yet a favourite in old days, judging by its many names, derived from the peculiar jarring noise it makes when exploring tree-trunks, and from its black and white plumage in vivid contrast to the crimson crown—names like Woodnacker and Wood-Pie. The toes are those of a climber, two placed to the front, and two behind, while the stiff, rounded tail gives strong support. The short, strong

bill is equal in depth and breadth ; far beyond the bill flashes out the long tongue, with barbs and a glutinous saliva. Like a squirrel, the bird magically disappears behind a trunk on alarm. The call-note is faintly suggested by the syllables, "quet, quet," and when flying a flute-like note is uttered. Now and then in the park we may have the pleasure of a glimpse of the midget Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, some five and a half inches long as compared to the other's nine and a half inches, but it is rarely viewed, as it haunts the tops of high trees. To see either of these birds for a moment, suddenly landing on a tree-trunk, is to receive a vivid impression of the colours and form which is not soon forgotten : off in a flash, the bird is lost in the tree-tops, and months may pass before it is again seen.

Part and parcel of the life of some old deer-parks is the amusing Nuthatch, with its steel-blue back, russet breast, and stumpy tail, its ringing whistle (faintly echoed by the words "quoit-quoit," like the sound of a pebble bounding along ice),

its habit of coming down a tree-trunk head-downwards with the same agility as it runs upwards, its dipping, jerky flight, and the noise it makes as it hammers at a hazel-nut, which it has fixed in the chink of an oak's bark. In a Nuthatch-haunted park the trunks of oaks are found studded with empty nutshells. Other vices are used, and it will adroitly fix the nuts into the chinks at the top of a fence, or in cracks of gate-posts. Sometimes it buries nuts, first ramming them into soft soil, then covering its treasure with leaves and earth, so that like the squirrel it is a forester. As it comes near to using a tool when fixing its nuts, so it is a skilled plasterer, making a smooth, neat lining of clay at the entrance to its nest-hole in a tree-trunk ; within it makes a bed of chips of fir-cones or of flakes from the bark of an old apple or yew, cheerless indeed compared to the snug cradle of the Long-tailed Titmouse, with its stuffing of several thousand feathers.

When this lively bird has been lured to a garden by the provision of feasts of nuts, it will take up, with its mate, almost a permanent residence, and their liquid calls

ring out in autumn as cheerily as in spring. Poised in a favourite pose, head downwards on a tree-trunk, the Nuthatch looks like a graven image of a bird, painted in watchet-blue, buff and chestnut. One can never tire of watching its quick movements as it flits about tree-trunks, flying like a flash of blue light, whistling and calling. Restless by nature, yet it has a gift of keeping perfectly still, as when it lands on a tree-trunk, and there clings fast by means of its long, sharp, curved talons, in the position in which it chanced to arrive. It may be taught tricks, like catching food in the air, or poising on a glass tumbler's edge to fish out nuts from within.

The quietest, most unassuming and industrious little bird in the park is the Tree-Creeper. A pattern of industry, it spends its days nimbly running, mouse-like, up tree-trunks, supporting itself by pressing the stiff tail-feathers to the bark, as it quests for minute insects with its long, slender, down-curved bill—the rigid upper mandible larger than the lower. Flying down from the heights of one tree-

trunk, it lands at the foot of the next to begin its Sisyphus-like task anew. Shy and retiring, it is as quick as a squirrel in dodging out a view round a trunk ; and when suspicious is often seen motionless, clear-cut on the side of a trunk, though if the sky be greyish, its breast blends with it, and its back suggests an out-standing bit of the tree-bark, a back painted in the tones of bark, so that the slim little mottled figure is part of the tree. A faint piping "twee-twee" may betray it, a shrill, mouse-like chirp, but it is a remarkably silent bird. It rarely flies far, and flies with the undulating curves of the Woodpecker and others which mostly haunt trees. Nearly always the nest is made in some crack in a trunk, or behind a loose bit of bark or a growth of ivy ; we may admire the way twigs are collected to reduce the space as the bird thinks fit.

We may wonder if any wild bird leads a more monotonous life than the Tree-Creeper, for ever climbing, and falling to climb again, living the year through wedded to trees. But it is no automaton, and its ghost of a song of three or four notes shows that it feels a spring fever.

The Woodwele sang and would not cease,
Sitting upon the spray,
So loud, he wakened Robin Hood,
In the greenwood where he lay.

In Sussex, the Wood-Lark is held to be a bird of the Weald, not intruding among the Sky-Larks of the Downs; a lover of wooded parks, it must needs have trees to perch upon, like the Tree-Pipit. Compared to the Sky-Lark it is recognized by its smaller size, by the shortness of the tail, and by its marked white eye-streak, as well as by its habit of singing from a tree, as it will after a summer shower. The song-flight, again, differs from the Sky-Lark's in that the Wood-Lark goes up to its airy watch-tower in ever-increasing circles, singing the while, and returning by another series of graduated curves. Country people say, it describes an exact circle about its nest on the ground. It sings far through a summer evening, and sometimes in the night-watches, as Gilbert White noticed in prose and poetry: "Unseen, the soft enamoured Wood-Lark sings." It will sing through most of a spring night, even through a cold night of March with squalls of hail which hush its

melody until the moon shines bright again. Musical critics have praised the Wood-Lark's song above the Sky-Lark's, and some have ranked the songster, so plaintive, so pleasing and flute-like are its melodies, second to Philomel. It is one of the year's first minstrels, and among the last to sing a valediction to summer, singing indeed, as Jeremy Taylor thought, "as if it had learned music and motion of an angel."

Black Neb, the Carrion-Crow, that lesser Raven, has a reputation as black as his coat as a bird of ill omen, especially to poultry and game-birds, and small mammals, like leverets. Yet we have seen a downland shepherd "telling his tale," or making his tally, "under the hawthorn in the dale," while a Crow sat on its nest over his head. He looked on the bird as company, with no fear that it would harm his lambs, or bode him ill by settling on his fold. While the Crow's harsh "krar!" is ominous to the ear, the bird wears no criminal look, like that proclaimed murderer, the Black-backed Gull. And

it has admirable qualities, if it be true that it pairs faithfully for life, and is content with the society of its mate the year round, though consorting with other Crows when carrion is to be discussed. And it is valiant in defence of its home, even attacking Ravens. Unfortunately, it will attack weaker brethren, and on occasion play havoc with a rookery's nests, or make war on Herons. An intelligent bird, when feeding by a sea estuary it will perform the artful feat of taking an oyster or mussel in its claws, rising to a height in the air, then letting it drop, rapidly following to suck the contents of the broken shell. Through much persecution, Black Neb seems to have discovered that it is safer to live in a town park than in the game-preserves. Its reputation has overshadowed its useful work as an eater of carrion and dead fish, and the same worms, grubs and pests which Rooks destroy in meadows, and this in spite of Longfellow's testimony :

Even the blackest of them all, the Crow,
Renders good service as your man-at-arms,
Crushing the beetle in his coat of mail,
And crying havoc on the slug and snail.

In spring and autumn, Carrion-Crows especially make themselves heard in the park, and one against another, while perched in a tree-top, will keep up an uncanny duet, as with inflated throat and jerks of the body they utter their discordant croaks, yet not unpleasing if mellowed by distance.

Year following year, a pair will breed in the same plantation, and often in the same nest which has served for many years past.

One of the most amusing characters in the Park is the Owl called Little, emblematic bird of ancient Athens, sacred to Pallas Athene, a dashing pirate that roves by day and by night, a remarkable sentry, as sharp as a Jay in giving warning when fox or stoats are on the trail, while no-one can pass it without arousing its alarm-call, a shrill double whistle—"Koo-wit!" It has mewling, barking, and bleating notes, and a love-call of musical quality. Very responsive to an imitation of its cries, it may be lured almost within hand's-reach. Mice and other small rodents, and beetles form its natural prey, as examination of

its cast-up pellets of undigested food may clearly prove, but it is unfortunate for its well-being in this country that it is easily led into temptation to take birds, and then the gamekeeper regards it as a sort of dancing demon in feathers, and describes its yellow eyes as "wicked." Other birds dislike the Little Owl, and it is a common sight in the park to see a little mob of several different species gathered together to raise a clamour against the bird of wisdom.

An air of mystery overhangs a grove of evergreens in the park where the Woodcock lurk by day, and whence they come forth at what our fathers would call "Cock-shot time." The Woodcock seems to trust to its perfect blending with the tones and markings of fallen leaves, but when it meets one's eye it rises, or runs to crouch again, almost as if aware of the saying,

For if a Woodcock can be seen,
'Tis certain he must die.

The artist's eye of Bewick observed how

the plumage was so marked, so spotted, barred, streaked and variegated, so painted in black, white, grey, red, brown, rufous and yellow, and so crossed and broken by lines and marks of different shapes, as to seem to imitate the ferns, sticks, mosses and grasses of its lonely haunts. In old days our fathers would hang nets across the woodland rides to catch the Woodcock when they were "roding," and coverts where the shameful trick was played may still be known as "Cock-shoots." A Sussex story tells of a sporting turnpike man of Ashdown Forest, who, on March and April evenings, would shoot Woodcock while he sat at his ease by his turnpike gate at the entrance to a glade, smoking his pipe and drinking his smuggled brandy.

Passing through the park in the gloaming we hear the rattle-song of the Nightjar, like the sound of a spinning-wheel. By chance we may mark it roosting lengthwise on a branch, before it has awakened itself from day-dreams by a curious, squeaking cry, to hawk for dor-beetles under the

boughs of the oaks, or skim above the mowing-grass for ghost-moths, as Wordsworth saw :

The busy Dor-Hawk chases the white moth
With burring note.

It likes to bask away daylight hours on sunny, ferny banks, and if put up, flutters away with a wavy, moth-like flight. But it hawks with Swallow-like directness, and doubles and twists like a Lapwing. The rattle-song is in harmony with "all things rural and verdurous," and there is something wonderfully pleasing in the rise and fall of the vibrations. On a still night, the strange music carries half-a-mile. A bird of mystery, singing this un-bird-like song, it is small wonder that it has fostered strange legends. Its structure has points of mystery, as the exact purpose of the bristles about the mouth, and the serrations on the inner side of the middle claw. It comes forth to hunt in the mysterious gloaming, noiseless and ghost-like in flight, yet is given to clapping its wings as if with intent to startle ; as one chases another, they toy together on the wing. When the sitting bird is put up from her eggs, she

flies a little way like some wounded moth, soon settling to open her great, bristle-girt mouth as if to utter dire threats. Then the two long, polished eggs, marbled with ash and purple, are seen on the ground, perfectly matching bracken or heather-twigs. The chicks which know no nest are also protected by colour, and their grey down might pass for upturned leaves ; the mother bird quickly shifts them if alarmed.

In Our Village

I bring you hope again ; I am the Swallow
I come with Spring ;
And, coming, with me bring
Dreams of the Summer-tide that is to follow.

MARIA STEUART.

LIKE the Stork and the Crane the Swallows, as remarked by the prophet Jeremiah, observe the time of their coming ; and should they feel it unpropitious and their welcome a cold one, after examining their old nesting-haunts, they retire for awhile. We marvel year after year at the faithful way the same birds return to the same homes : we may almost recognize their glad twitterings. There is a twitter for joy, as who can doubt who hears the eager notes of the Swallow hawking for flies on a genial day, and there is a shrill note of anger or fear as it darts ferociously at a cat or dog, or even stoops to a Hawk, and there is the melodious warble as it perches on a sunny barn-roof. Faithful to its old name, swallow-wort, the greater celandine blossoms when the Swallows come, and

does not shed the last of its pale gold flowers until the day they go. On that day they sing their last incantation. It differs from the "Swallow-flights of song" which charmed us in summer, the sweet low warbling so often heard in the heat and burden of a midsummer noontide, when other songsters were silent—the grand chorus of twittered good-byes from a thousand assembled throats is an exultant valediction, and the sky is almost darkened when the great packs drift away southward.

Country people say that when birds of the Swallow tribe nest on a house they bring good luck; where the birds build, they say, there will be gold or children. Certainly House-Martins add to a home a liveliness which grows more marked as brood follows brood. Two Martins of May become seven in July, in a month or so the family numbers twelve, and before long there may be seventeen. The gathering of the broods about the nest, for which they have a deep attachment, their joyful twittering calls, and the musical lullabies which are crooned within

the nest, endow the quietest cottage with a sense of stressful activity, as with music. We may suppose that no moment is lost by House-Martins when they come in spring in visiting their mud castles of last year under the house-eaves, and their animated twittering as they eagerly hop in and out, two sometimes entering at once, seems to bespeak their house-pride. It is as if they cannot contain their delight at finding the old home in place, if somewhat damaged by Sparrows which had entertained the idea of nesting therein. They perch on the outside of the nest, and hover about, examining and testing the stucco-work, fervently twittering all the while: no happier home-coming could be imagined. It is charming to see the Martin's little black head and snowy white throat as once again it surveys the village street from its home, then to hear it uttering a warbled strain, a song of home, which brings its mate swooping to the eave, the two falling to billing and cooing like any Turtle-Doves. Their fleet forms and flashing white rumps bring a new sense of life to the sleepest village street.

Happy are those who enjoy the company

of the Martins which nest outside their bedroom windows, so they may hear at night the low twittering warbling with which they beguile the night-watches, as if they ask with Milton, "What hath night to do with sleep?"

As "the jolly hours lead on propitious May," if there is an old horse-pond in the village the birds make another lively study as with the Swallows they come and go in quest of brick and mortar for their mud-castles. All the Martins of the village, with Swifts and Swallows, haunt the pond, to hawk over the green surface for flies, and to dip to the water as they drink on the wing. The Martins descend to the water's edge in little flocks to dibble for mud-pellets. When building, one or other of a pair will return from the pond to the nest, with new bricks for the sun's baking, about once a minute. The labour seems to be divided between the two birds, but it may be the cock which likes to crouch within the nest, as the walls grow, to warble the short, swift song. Now and then, as one of the builders clings to the nest, a Swift will flash up and hover a moment, as if casting a jealous eye on the

Martin's building-craft, in which it is lacking.

An amusing scene is enacted in mid-summer, when young Martins are seen looking forth at the world thirty feet below them, and perhaps begin to understand they must brave the adventure of their first flight. They have but to make the plunge, and their perfect little wings will be set in proper action ; but they hesitate. The parents urge them with eager twitterings, even pulling at their beaks. Then perchance may be seen a delightful ritual. Other Martins are attracted to the nest till a band gathers, twenty strong, to race back and forth, twittering as if to say, "Come forth, ye fearful fledglings, and join our revels—enjoy the freedom of the air." Thus encouraged, one by one the young birds take the fateful plunge. Their untried wings bring them safely to the house-roof. To swoop up under the eave and into the nest is a trick of flight which demands practice.

Then, when first the clans gather on house-roofs or telegraph-wires as the days draw near for the outward voyage, they give us another charming picture as they

bask in the sun and rest, and it is amusing to see how the young birds are still fed by their ever-devoted parents. It may be that these young ones of the early broods will be voyaging southwards before their parents see the later broods on the wing. The parents we may have with us until November, even into December.

Near the village may be a sand-pit, river-bank or sea-cliff, whither the dusky little Sand-Martins, after wintering in India and Africa, come in March as the heralds of the Swallow hosts. This is the one Swallow never tempted to our houses to nest. The first of its tribe to arrive, it is first to depart, in mid-September. Some come faithfully back to a well-remembered nest-hole of last year; others, on arrival, start excavating new holes, tunnelling galleries into the cliff, which slant upwards to a depth of two or three feet, and end in the chamber for the eggs. The bird's bill is but a weak tool for this work, but is aided by the claws. One of the most charming bird-pictures of latter March is that of the little herald Swallows

hovering about the cliff where they will nest, prospecting for holes, and flying in their moth-like wavering way, and it is charming to hear the little warble of the male as it flutters before the hole of good hope. Water always attracts the birds, and before setting sail for the tropics they gather to roost among the reeds of a river-side.

Early in May, the South Down shepherd marks the little parties of Swifts, about a score strong, which come swooping in on their scythe-shaped wings across the Channel at something like two hundred miles an hour ; and he watches them as they pass over a dew-pond on the brow of the hill where, for a fraction of a second, they stay their wings as bills snap at the water-insects, then sweep on over the brow and down the face of the hills to the village below. And the villagers mark them as they arrive and go screeching about the church tower once more. There is something sombre and wild about the sooty-black Swifts, named the Devil's Screechers by some countrymen. Though cliff-nesters

by nature, they make content to nest below the eaves of thatched cottages and in the church tower, their curiously flattened form allowing them to pass through narrow portals. Their wild and joyous screams as they race on their everlasting courses round the church tower are part of village life in summer. They are among the latest of our summer visitors and among the earliest to depart, staying to rear but one brood of two young ones, and not staying to moult before returning to Africa. The young remain in the nest for as long as forty-one days, and are ready to migrate within a few days of leaving the nest. These are the most aërial of birds, rarely touching earth, never perching like Swallows (perch they cannot, since all four toes point forward) feeding and drinking on the wing, gathering on the wing their nesting-material, such as floating straws, and on the wing performing their courting rites : none of our birds lives at greater pressure. They fly at racing speed sixteen hours a day, and are the last of the day-birds to go to roost. Sharp eyes will detect a remarkable feature of their flight, that the play of the wings seems independent of each other. At the height

of the summer they may be heard after ten o'clock, if not seen, still racing round on the paths followed by their ancestors for a thousand years, and we make out that the males are pursuing the females, chasing them back to their duties in the nest.

Starlings haunt all places. The clapping of their tiny castanets and their medley of whistles are among the best concerts to be heard in London, and they are as much at home in city squares as on sea-cliffs, in marshes and meadows, woods and gardens. They are lovers of the village church; lovers of a chimney-pot; and of a walnut-tree in summer, just as the Willow-Wren seems on its natural stage when spilling its silvery chimes from the shining leaves of a streamside willow. On a chimney-pot on a bright April morning the Starling cuts a gallant figure as the sun lights up its iridescent greenish-black feathers, glossed and burnished with purple, green and violet reflections, changing in different lights. Having sung its morning hymn, it prospects for straws for stuffing under

an eave. A hole it must have for its nest, and it has no hesitation in ousting a Green Woodpecker from a new hole it has diligently excavated. Nesting-days break the sociable bonds which bind Starlings, but the young birds soon gather into flocks. Perhaps no bird is more sociable at heart than the Starling, in its element in a mixed crowd, such as gathers in winter in some field which offers good feeding, clan upon clan of Rooks, Jackdaws, Field-fares, Redwings, and Lapwings. A Starling flock when feeding in a meadow sometimes may be observed suddenly to rise and mingle with a flock passing overhead, bearing the others company for awhile, and sometimes, as it seems, inviting them to share the good things of the meadow. All may then descend to the feast, the travellers staying long enough to show they have appreciated the invitation.

The aërial evolutions of the great flocks in winter as they wing their way to their roosting-places make one of our most striking bird-pictures. A pack will stretch from horizon to horizon, like a gigantic riband athwart the sky, or circle to gather

until the birds in their myriads form some colossal figure in the sky, like that of a fabulous balloon, while the whirr of their wings is like a rushing wind. As a cloud of Starlings settles to roost in a reed-bed, the slender reeds sway and bend under their weight. If a bird lands at the extreme tip of one, it is hard pressed to steady itself; this accomplished, instantly its beak opens and outpours its whistles, and when at last the whole flock is settled and hidden from view the air is filled by the confusion of their tongues. The roar of wings is like a "mighty harmony" as flock after flock hurtles down to the reed-beds—literally their beds. As we watch the immense flocks passing high overhead in autumn, and admire the perfection of their drill as they wheel, now in extended order, a struggling, far-flung company, then in so compact a mass that the eye can see nothing of the sky behind, it seems the more remarkable that some Starlings join in none of these revels, but—being perhaps older birds—are content to whistle through autumn and winter from our chimney-pots, to spend the day about a garden bird-table, and roost in the same eaves where

they nested. We marvel, too, at the sight of myriads of Starlings flying as one, to recall that within living memory this was a scarce and local bird, rare in Ireland and unknown in many parts of Scotland, whereas now no bird is more widely diffused.

The Starling is a prince of mimics. An authority on the bird life of the moors relates that in October it will give an amazingly perfect imitation of the soft spring note of the Golden Plover, and of the loud spring whistle of the Curlew, though it could not have heard the notes for months. In October the stay-at-home household Starling often surprises us by the perfection with which it hits off the Thrush's whistle, or utters the Lapwing's cry. It gives us rare entertainment. Its old name, Stare (from the root, *Sturnus*) has a slight resemblance to one of its notes.

On a fine summer day the Starling proves itself a master of flight by hawking for flies in the style of a Swallow. Often it is seen in this pursuit about sea-cliffs where it mingles with the Jackdaws, and on extended wings soars with them as they float and frolic in the air for hours together.

By Hedge-row Elms

ALL the best songs of summer are heard along the footpath way through the wind-rippled cornfields and the hayfields white-sheeted with moon-daisies, set about by hedges garlanded with wild roses and honeysuckle. Goldfinches make music wherever they go ; Greenfinches keep up perpetual tinkling love-talk ; the Lark soars to "unthread its chaplet of musical pearls." In the gloaming, Partridges call in the jungle of the grasses, Nightjars croon in the oaks. Little foxes brush sleek sides against the corn-stems. The last songs of the evening make the music for the strange dance of the ghost-moths, swaying back and forth above the daisies. Then—listen—

How thick the bursts come crowding through
the leaves !

Again—thou hearest !
Eternal Passion !
Eternal Pain !

An ever-welcome spring herald, one

whose arrival in our fields makes the day memorable, is the cheery Yellow Wagtail, the Barley-bird, an early-comer in the sowing-month. In dancing flight it returns to its old and well-remembered haunt, perhaps a pasture which has been its English home for ten or twenty years. If there should be cows grazing, the moment it lands it begins, without ado, its time-honoured task of snapping insects from under the cows' feet, and fluttering to take flies about their ears as they shake their heads. It deserves a name given in France to the Blue-headed Wagtail, "Little shepherdess of the spring," suggested by its habit of resorting to sheep-folds. All Wagtails in France have the name *Lavandière*, from the way one will flick the water with its tail while tripping on a water-lily, as washerwomen beat linen.

Early in May "the voice of the Turtle" is added to new tokens of summer, as small flocks of the pretty Doves drift low over the meadows on coming from African winter quarters. The soft, agreeable and somewhat plaintive note, a repeated "tur,"

may have given the name ; it has something of the churring sound of the Night-jar's voice, a vibratory quality no doubt pleasing to the object of the song, to whom a love-lorn bird coos for hours while she sits on her eggs.

The gentle Turtle-Dove, since Solomon mentioned it, has ever been a bird of sentiment. It is the voice of Spring. Since time out of mind the bird has been the pattern of a lover, such is the unswerving devotion of one of a pair to the other.

They wait for the sweet of the year before they come to us, and late springs delay their arrival. Ground-feeders, they subsist largely on weed-seeds, and are notably fond of drinking and bathing. They are usually in small flocks, which at night roost in high trees. When nesting, they lose some of their amiable, gentle and confiding ways, growing shy as they build their scanty structures of sticks in bush or tree, through which the two pure white polished eggs may be viewed from below. At close quarters, the quiet beauty of the Dove fills the eye with delight, the lovely hue of the neck and soft breast, a

delicate wine-red, the greyish-blue of the crown and neck, the patch of black, white-tipped feathers on either side of the neck, the bright brown and black tones of the back, the rounded tail, the white lower coverts, the red legs, and the bold eyes with bright reddish irides. The love-flight of the male is a charming performance as it soars aloft and on outstretched wings glides down to its perch, the tail spread fanwise, displaying the beautiful black and white feathers.

The just word for describing the Turtle-Dove's plaint is a point on which poets have been well agreed since Virgil wrote, "Nor shall from lofty elm the Turtle cease to moan."

The lively gestures of the Meadow-Pipit add their quota to the charm of the meadow footpath in summer, as to commons, moors and downs, whence they soar in modest emulation of the Lark, to pour forth their twittered songs in descent. They are especially likely to receive the mixed blessing of the Cuckoo's attention, and the sight of pairs of Meadow-Pipits

restlessly flying about a Cuckoo, attempting to drive it away, teasing and buffeting it, is a typical scene of the April bird-calendar. The Cuckoo is not easily banished, and with exemplary patience will devote hours on end in marking down—as we may well believe is its habit—the nests it will victimize.

The little Tree-Pipit gives us a charming and distinctive performance of song and flight to add to all the pleasant sights and sounds which go with hay-making. It is an exclusive bird, and while one might hear a score of Meadow-Pipits in such a favourite haunt as the South Downs, soaring to spill their delicate songs in unison, it is rare to hear a Tree-Pipit duet. As from its favourite perch at the top of the hayfield's elm it launches itself into the air, the effort of soaring seems engrossing, and it is not until it is ready to descend that the song opens, with Canary-like or Lark-like notes. Down it glissades in a stately curve, on wings held open and motionless, with legs hanging and tail a-cock, and as it comes to anchor

the song enters on a new phase, sweeter even than before, like a burst of praise for safe harbourage after a perilous voyage. From mid-April to mid-October it favours our woodlands and hedge-row elms, spending a great part of each day in the heavenward climb on its quivering wings—to a height about equal to that of the tree it sprang from—then warbling its monosyllabic chant as it sweeps to its perch, rarely touching ground without first landing in the tree; the way it sings through the sunny hours suggests a contented mind. Sometimes it warbles in the trees, occasionally on the ground. The fervent notes are full of summery ideas.

The Whitethroat, that musical chatter-box, appoints itself the sprightly sentry of the hedge on arrival from overseas about the second week of April, and scolds at every wayfarer, but so agreeably that no offence is taken. Somewhat large for a member of the melodious Warbler tribe, not so neat and dapper as the Lesser Whitethroat, the bird is built on the finest, daintiest lines, and makes a pleasing study

in rich browns and quiet greys, with the gleaming white throat, and the little crest erected in defiance of an intruder. Like a wild rose, it adds a grace to the hedge-row ; and beds of stinging-nettles may be forgiven much for harbouring the food which nourishes Whitethroats, and for hiding and guarding the deep nests they lightly weave of grass or plant-stalks, and line with fine bents and horsehair, dainty cradles for the greenish-white, speckled eggs. The cock keeps vigilant guard, ever on the alert for trespassers whom he greets with scolding song, raising the head-feathers, and cutting odd capers with many jerks and gestures, and often soaring while singing as high again as a tall hedge. Its motions suggest a butterfly's as it jerks itself aloft to sing and scold, suddenly dropping with diminishing song. Dally in passing, and it will repeat the performance, and follow one a little way down the lane ; and a world of meaning is to be read into its sharp notes. An adroit flycatcher, it may take an insect on the wing as it flits about the hedge. If disturbed on her nest, the hen flutters off as if wounded, thereby often betraying a secret which the nettles

otherwise might have closely guarded. Peggy Whitethroat, she is called ; and the Christian name seems like a term of endearment.

The Lesser Whitethroat is well named, a less dominant character than Peggy, smaller and less abundant. It lacks the other's handsome, reddish-brown wing-coverts, is greyer, and is identified by dark ear-coverts, and grey legs, its cousin's being brown, as by its voice. The song is a minor performance, short and of small compass, varied by a pleasing, low "inward melody," and has a quiet echo of the Chaffinch's rollicking stave. Though shy, and haunting the most secluded hedge-rows, the Lesser Whitethroat has a cheerful and volatile spirit, if it be a trifle petulant and given to scolding. The chicks inherit the shy instinct, and on alarm will scramble from the nest even before they can fly.

Like the Spotted Flycatcher, the Red-backed Shrike is a late summer visitor, not now very abundant. It comes faithfully back to old haunts which it may have known for many seasons. This bold

privateer's handsome coat of many colours, grey and chestnut, black and white, is an ornament to the hedgerow. When it makes its summer home in some overgrown chalk-pit in a field or under the downs, it must seem a very dragon to other smaller birds, mice, humble-bees, grasshoppers and blue-bottles which live about the dingle, and must face the danger of finding themselves or their young impaled on the thorns of the Shrike's larder. How deeply rooted is the instinct for spearing the prey on a thorn is seen when Shrikes are reared in aviaries, and a young one kills and impales a live mouse, though it could never have seen its parents perform the deed. Far and wide through Europe the Shrike is known as the butcher, a keeper of a shambles, in Germany, where it is also "the garrotter," and in France, where it is named "the flayer." A Continental species which sometimes visits us, the Woodchat, is famed for courage in attacking any intruder on its preserve, and is known in Malta by the curious name, "father of biters."

Our Butcher-Bird has a favourite watch-tower on an exposed branch of a high

hedge, where it flirts its tail as it keenly watches for any passing prey, at which it darts in pursuit in the way of a Flycatcher ; crossing a field, it flies low and straight. We may have little sympathy with its way of earning a living, but it makes appeal to us in many ways, even though we suspect it would be pleased to stick us alive on a thorn.

Every place has its bird, the mountain torrent its Dipper, the housetop its Sparrow, and nearly every lane its Chaffinch, a notable lover of lanes, where it picks up an easy living. It is a great favourite, a bird of character, which seems to find perfect expression in its jolly lyric, and is reflected in the French proverb, "*Gai comme Pinson.*" The song is a homely sort, always the same, when perfected, with never a note out of place, and the rollicking tune has no trace of pathos. The Chaffinch sings with deliberation, not waywardly, it likes a prominent perch, and likes to sing the song to a final flourish. It is one of the first true songs of spring (as distinct from those of our

select winter bird-choir), opening in February, and perhaps never more delightful than in the days of plum and pear blossom, when, like the spirit of April, it puts a spirit of youth in everything. "Tol-de-rol, lol-chick-wee-eedo!" is its burden. Jollity, not sentiment, is its motive, in spite of one neat translation of the music into "Sweet, sweet—bring-my-pretty-love-to-meet-me-here." There is a suggestion in it of the hoof-beats of a horse, galloping and leaping.

In every hedge in April we find the exquisite cradles of the Chaffinches, those dainty round cups of mossy walls, some plain, others miracles of decorative bird-architecture, profusely adorned with silvery lichens and cocoons fastened by gossamer, the lichen or moss being taken from the nest-tree, and within so snugly lined with hair, down and feathers. The mother bird may give a fortnight to the weaving and decoration of her nest, while the cock sets her work to music, and proclaims himself all day "As gay as a Chaffinch."

A field of new-mown hay, in the mid-days of summer, is a bird's paradise.

Aloft, the Larks sing all day, though some of their joyously-sounding songs may be dirges for ruined nests. All the field is made musical by the Linnets, now forming packs, fifty to a hundred strong. There gather also many musical families of Greenfinches and Goldfinches, to sing their songs of summer. Among the wild roses, the Yellow Hammer drones its monotonous chant through the heat of the day. The Warblers grow silent when tending families, but the Greenfinch sings on, as if family cares were no burden.

The perpetual tinkling notes which come from Greenfinches in the hedge-row elms are airy strains full of summery ideas. Through the day their love-talk goes on as they tend nestlings, or with fledglings drift about the hayfield. The favourite phrase in the song is a Canary-like trill ; there are melodious warbling notes ; and an oft-repeated call, like a musical scream, long-drawn and tremulous. Out of the fullness of their hearts, it seems, they circle in song about the hedge-tops.

Greenfinches wear contented looks ; there is a certain portliness, the air of an alderman at a feast, about one perched

comfortably on a thorn in late summer to attack the crimson haws, which set off finely its rich sage-green costume, slashed with yellow. In contrast to the heavy air is the blitheness of the song of this "brother of the dancing leaves," and the quick, strong flight. Sociable birds, they congregate in large flocks in autumn, and associate with other Finches, at the least alarm taking to a tree.

I love to see the little Goldfinch pluck
The groundsel's feather'd seed, and twit, and twit ;
And then, in bower of apple-blossoms perch'd,
Trim his gay suit, and pay us with a song.
I would not hold him pris'ner for the world.

HURDIS.

Choicest and loveliest of all winter flocks of birds are those of the Goldfinches. In a familiar and ever charming picture a band of fifty or more is seen, the members perching on a bed of thistles or groundsel ; we may have but a moment for admiring their crimson caps, and then they take to their golden wings as one bird, their sweet and lively call-notes falling like a rain of music. In their gipsy-like life they must travel many long miles in a day ; and their

day seems full of "country contentments." These winter flocks, so gay in feathering, the hens nearly as bright as the cocks and as lively in voice and motion, make up what our fathers would call "a charm of Goldfinches." A cock Goldfinch in spring seems not unaware of the glory of its wings, and may be seen stretching them, fanwise, to display the gold bars, like a tailor showing a cloth of gold, whence perhaps arose the name, Proud Tailor.

Who so merry, so merry as he ?

Bully, what fairy warbles in thy throat ?

J. MONTGOMERY.

Looping down the lane goes the Bullfinch with its ever-faithful mate—a life partner, who shall doubt ? In its coat of many colours, rich velvety black and steely blue, white and red, the refined red of some old bricks, it cuts a cheerful figure, though piping a plaintive note. In autumn the note, melancholy in tone and cadence, is in harmony with the spirit of the time. Shy birds and retiring, haunting dense copses, yet they permit us to approach within a

few yards before setting off on another short, looping flight. They are lovers of high, rambling hedge-rows, and become scarce in summer where they cannot find the tangled hedge to their liking for the peculiar twiggy nest, like a little platform of twigs and roots with a cup for some wool or hair.

Through the mournful, musical whistle the Bullfinch no doubt came by its many quaint old-time names, faintly suggesting the call—Nope, Alp, Pope, and Hoop. The desultory warble is so low that few heed it in the spring chorus of the birds, but the call note, as clear and sweet as sad, is arresting on a still November day. It is remarkable that while the wild birds have so low and soft a warble and so sad a pipe, the caged Bullfinches whistle melodies with deep, full tones, and by faithfully rendering airs have earned the name, Piping Bullfinches. Wild or tame, the Bullfinch we hold to be one of the most lovable of all our birds.

A handsome Bunting most at home in the south country is the Cirl Bunting, a

shyer bird than the Yellow Hammer, and it escapes much notice, being given to hiding in and about thick hedges, but is betrayed by a somewhat Robin-like call-note; if it shows itself for an instant it quickly retreats. It is a lover of a hedge-row elm, wherefrom the male sings its unpretentious lay—reedy, rapid notes suggesting a Yellow Hammer's. In hard weather, Cirl Buntings are seen in farmyards with flocks of Finches.

An arch deceiver of some fields is a local bird, the Grasshopper Warbler, as shy and skulking as the Land-rail. Having flown from the Continent in April to settle in a hedge, it rarely uses its wings, but clings to its sanctuary in a grassy ditch, where are weeds about which it creeps and climbs like a mouse. By day and by night it sings its reeling song, and it is well named, for its song is the song of the grasshopper, but louder and more sustained: could it have been inspired, in the beginning, by grasshoppers? The *crescendo* and *diminuendo* of the reeling seems to make it ventriloquistic, or the way the

wide-opened mouth is turned from side to side. Some countrymen call it, "the mowing-machine bird." It is the most shy and retiring of all our choice warblers.

In our open fields Redwings and Fieldfares often appear for their annual winter sojourn as the last of the Swallows leave home, the harbingers of spring thus meeting the harbingers of winter. It is a pleasure to see the handsome Scandinavian Thrushes again, the Redwings with their warm brown and red tones, and the Fieldfares with their shadings of blue and grey, whence were derived such names as Bluebacks and Blue-felts. When a flock of Redwings is scattered over a pasture, it is often observed that the birds suggest dead leaves fluttering in the wind. As autumn afternoons draw in, congregations of Redwings gather in tree-tops, to give a murmuring concert, and on warm March days they fill the air with a sweet jargoning, what old-time bird-fanciers would describe as "recording," or softly rehearsing the true song which in their native country gave them the name of Norwegian

Nightingales. Delicate birds, an open winter means to them the difference between life and death, since a hard spell quickly reduces them to skeletons. After snow it is pitiable to find frozen birds, with their pretty red underwings, lying in the hedge-bottoms, when we reflect how easily they might have continued their journey to sunny coasts. When we see a flock feeding in a moist meadow we may recall an old country name, Wind-Thrush, arising from their habit of standing like statues, with wings a little drooped, the tails straight or slightly raised, and the heads turned to the wind. Another name was Windmill Thrush, perhaps because the working of the wings suggested the revolving of a windmill's sails, or because the birds sought shelter by windmills in hard weather. After long days in open meadows, they roost among evergreen shrubs and trees.

The Fieldfare's name (sometimes sounded as Fulfer, and in Devon as Vole-Vier) well becomes this roamer of our winter fields. It is the handsomest of the Thrushes, but lacks the fine spirit and strength of our own Stormcocks. In April,

like the Redwings, Fieldfares in flocks treat us to farewell concerts before setting sail to their nest-trees in Scandinavia, and, assembled high in tree-tops, keep up a sustained warbling and twittering, pleasing to the ear and imagination.

In Shadiest Covert

Up this green woodland path, we'll softly rove,
And list the Nightingale ; she dwelleth here.

CLARE.

IN March the little brownish-yellowish Chiffchaff arrives from overseas to call its name in the woods. Its "chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff" has some magic in it which puts the spirit of youth into everything. This is the first of the migrant song-birds to appear, and the smallest of the woodland choir they make. It is remarkable to recall that the birds were scarcely known in the eighteenth century, and lacked an English name. The little song rings out almost as blithely in the dull dog-days as when first heard in the days of white violets, when it means almost as much to many lovers of birds as the first-heard Cuckoo's call. "Chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff"—on and on goes the song until white violets have given way to wild roses, then to be missed for a season while the parents settle in the world the young bred in their enchanting nest, domed and feather-lined, on or near the ground. After midsummer the song is heard again

even until October. It is the simplest of all warblers' songs, but the two notes are sung with spirit, and repeated several times without pause, ringing out like a quiet bell, sometimes running into one another as the singer grows excited in its eternal quest for insects.

Chiffchaffs are so abundant that it is not surprising to hear their voices in London parks. A new story, which must have sent a ripple of laughter round the world, an official story from the Office of Works, concerns a Hyde Park Chiffchaff which became notorious by deserting the bird-sanctuary in the Park, with its effigy of Rima, directly that Sanctuary was declared open by the Prime Minister (Mr. Baldwin). The Under-Secretary for Home Affairs made a speech about the bird in Parliament. An honourable member questioned him : would he admit that Rima was a scarecrow ?

When the willows are budding into leaf comes the little olive-green Willow-Wren, to flit with restless urgency from twig to twig, with heedful eye scrutinizing every opening leaflet for its prey, often fluttering

into the air, on short fly-fishing excursions, and ever again warbling its plaintive lay. Soon the sweet anthems are heard on all hands, since Willow-Wrens are among the most abundant of our summer visitors. The first-heard song is a musical milestone. In a minor key, pure, sweet, and with pathos, it ranks as one of our most precious and finished bird-songs. It runs down the scale in a cadence, like a fairy chime of bells; enduring for three seconds, it is made up of a ten-times repeated note, and the little chime will be repeated at eight-second intervals for long spells, bringing to mind the words, "That strain again; it had a dying fall." And the little cascade of music, allowing for the usual midsummer spell of silence, ripples from the trees all the way from April to September.

A trio of these most charming "Leaf-Warblers" is completed by the Wood-Wren, whose tinkling, trilling song is the very voice of summer among the beech leaves. It is among the choicest of our Warblers, in delicacy of shape and sweetness of note, and when it trills on the wing gives a

dainty performance. Before launching itself into the air on tremulous wings it utters a few notes in the tree, and then the little form is seen to be all a-shiver with a sort of ecstasy as it takes to its wings, as if the song impels flight. The notes, sweet and clear at first, quicken and run into an agitated trill until it comes to anchor after a short voyage across a glade. It loves the heights of mountainous beeches as the Lark loves the sky and, like that high-flyer, nests on the ground, though few find out the domed, featherless cradle and the tiny, brown-speckled eggs.

Most musical, most melancholy bird.

MILTON.

Three or four liquid, throbbing passionate notes—"Tiuu, tiuu, tiuu"—proclaim that the Nightingale once again is "in shadiest covert hid," and is trying over the prelude of its nocturnal lay, the song of songs. Eternal passion!—eternal pain!—breathing out, as Izaak Walton thought, such sweet descants "that might make mankind to think miracles are not ceased." And mankind might think that Philomel

never sleeps. By day, the "music of the moon" seems like a magic lure to attract others beside its mate, and one may observe its understudy, the little Blackcap, drawing nearer and still nearer, and essaying to match its flute-like notes with the master's. Warbling a few rich staves, a gushing fount of song, it then falls silent, as if listening in abashed awe. It may be the Nightingale's voice which calls up the Larks in the hour before dawn, as the Owls have the duty of calling the barn-yard cocks. Hearing the Nightingale's love-laboured song, at a range of a quarter-of-a-mile, we too work our way to the covert, and through the gloaming make out the shapely bird, and admire the chestnut-brown hues, and mark the throbbing of its throat. We may try to decide if the breast of the bird forlorn be truly "uptill a thorn." We may glimpse an affinity between Nightingale and Robin; each keeps strictly in pairs, and if one of a pair meets another in the nesting days, a duel takes place. Philomel has the Robin's bold eye, and throws sidelong glances. Veils of mystery surround its life, and we would not willingly have them lifted. We read that the cocks

arrive in England before the hens ; all we know is that the master-singer comes faithfully back to old haunts, and though it may be a deserter for years, at long last it comes again. Does rivalry enter into the matchless song ?—or is it essentially a love-song ? No song could breathe out more love ! Robin sings the year round ; the Nightingale but for five or six weeks or fewer, while courting, and on honeymoon. Having established a mate in the nest of dead oak-leaves, on the hatching of the olive-green eggs which have cradled the music of the moon, the matchless voice breaks. But at that same moment the wild roses make their blushing appearance. Meantime the forlorn bird swears to an eternal passion—“ Tiuu, tiuu, tiuu, tiuu ! ” And sweetest and dearest are the songs uttered below the breath, inward melodies, not intended for mortal ear.

It is an old tale that it is fortunate to hear a Nightingale before the Cuckoo, one referred to more than once by Chaucer, and mentioned by Milton :

Thy liquid notes that close the eye of day,
First heard before the shallow Cuccoo's bill,
Portend success in love.

Year after year the little Blackcap, with its brown-capped mate, comes faithfully back to the self-same blackberry-spray where it is wont to hymn "the incense-gathering spring," the choicest of all our woodland songsters, if we set the Nightingale apart as without compeer. The wood-wild notes bring to mind the words of Parson White of Selborne, "the Blackcap has a full, sweet, deep, loud, and wild pipe." Though a shy warbler, it is like a Goldcrest in permitting a quiet observer to make a near approach while it utters its delicious wayward warble from bramble-spray or brier, so that from within a few inches we may see how the little throat quivers and swells as the liquid notes gush forth, and how the black cap is erected if we interrupt the performance. Most charming is the "inward melody," when it sings in an undertone, as it were under the breath. Robin and Nightingale sing such songs, as if intended for one ear alone, and not for our ears. In the Blackcap's varied roundelay we hear notes as pure and clear as any from Thrush, Blackbird and Nightingale. The male takes a share of duty in sitting-days, and will warble to

itself the while ; as will Philomel on like occasion.

Deep toned

The Cushat plains ; nor is her changeless plaint
Unmusical, when with the general quire
Of woodland harmony it softly blends.

GRAHAME.

There is something soothing and healing to tired nerves in the comfortable crooning of the Wood-Pigeon, its "coo-coo, coo-coo, coo-coo, coo," so suggestive of all things spring-like, and among the first love-songs of the year. The singer becomes ever more lustrous in plumage as spring draws on, the picture of a bird bridegroom "shining in his strength." The ritual of the courting is almost as fantastic as the love-rites of Blackcock, and we smile to see the love-sick Pigeon as it bobs and sidles along a branch towards its chosen one, with neck puffed out and tail spread and wings flirting, ducking the head until at last bill touches bill. Then it sails away, smartly clapping with its wings, soaring high into the air, and gliding gracefully to the perch. The soft crooning is among the few songs which go on from February to October, and in

the prevailing silence of autumn is an arresting note, though so familiar. Another ritual pleasant to observe is the roosting of the great autumn flocks of Pigeons, how they circle high in the air before dropping with closed wings to the topmost branches of the trees, and perch awhile to watch the day die before dropping to lower perches to sleep, with heads to the wind. They are light sleepers, and to strike a match beneath the roost-tree at night is enough to set a Wood-Pigeon into startled flight, with loud wing-clapping, or it is enough merely to pass along the road by the tree. The crooning may be heard far through the night watches, bringing perhaps Wordsworth's lines to mind :

He sang of love with quiet blending,
Slow to begin, and never ending ;
Of sorrows, faith, and inward glee ;
That was the song, the song for me.

We can never see a Goldcrest, that " little king crowned," as he was admirably styled by scientific godfathers, without marveling how its tiny wings can carry it over the seas, and how its fairy-like form endures

the utmost rigours of frost and snow. It is the smallest of all our birds, no more than three and a half inches in length, and as it flits about the dark firs, now creeping like a Wren, then climbing with the eccentric posturing of a Titmouse, or hovering like a moth, it utters the tiniest of all bird-notes, or sings the least of bird songs. Woodcock-pilot is an old name that comes to mind as autumn draws on, and Goldcrests come in from overseas to show the Woodcock the way. A Norfolk name, Herring-spink, came from the frequent sight of the little wanderers settling on the rigging of the herring-luggers. In winter they roam our woods along with Titmice in merry, eager parties, to which a few demure Tree-Creepers may attach themselves ; so minute seem the Goldcrests that beside them Coal-Titmice and Blue Titmice seem like giants. The eye may be attracted by the glint of sunshine on the kinglets' tiny, burnished crowns ; the queenlets have their crowns, but they lack lustre. The restless little voyagers add a new interest to the sleeping November woods.

Cocks are distinguished from hens by

the sign of the cock's broad orange streak from the forehead over the crown, and the hens' lemon streak. Besides their golden crests, the little birds appeal to the eye by their olive-green upper parts, tinged with yellow, the ash-hued cheeks, the greyish-white underparts, shaded with buff, and the touches of white on the wings.

The hardy northerners, strong to endure the snows of Siberia, make light of bathing, sometimes in parties, on our coldest winter days.

When the little hanging nest is built on the underside of a branch of a spruce, larch, or yew in March, it fills the eye with delight, a fairy-like, spherical cradle of such featherweight stuff as moss, lichens, spiders'-webs, willow-down or caterpillars' cocoons. Several nests may be built before the little hen is satisfied, and lays her clutch of tiny brown-spotted eggs.

The courage of the Goldcrest is as remarkable as its pigmy size, since it permits an observer to stalk it within a few feet, and will sing to one its cheery little song from the far side of a tree or bush, a weak song, but pleasing, a minor edition of the Wren's. The high-pitched call-note

is a mouse-like "tsit, tsit." We have few birds like Goldcrests which will sing on fearlessly while we could touch them by stretching a hand, though Long-tailed Titmice are remarkably tame, and sometimes Goldfinches allow a near approach as they feed on their favourite thistle-heads. Small as is the Goldcrest's crown, it does something to cheer a dull winter day in the woods, as we forget the gloom for a moment when Goldfinches go flocking by, with their crimson caps, gold-barred wings, and silvery notes.

A rare visitor to south-country woods is the Firecrest, wearing a crest of deeper orange than the Goldcrest's and distinguished by three dark lines on each side of its head, giving it the name in France, "*Roitelet à triple bandeau*."

"The moping Owl doth to the moon complain"—and never are its complaints more ringing and insistent than when made to harvest and hunters' moons, in still autumn nights. The screech of the Barn Owl is perhaps the most blood-curdling cry which comes from any of our birds, and

one might think it to be a signal for all wise mice to take cover. It is held to be ominous by some country people, for legends of death and doom still cling about the birds. The mellow hooting of the Brown Owl is by contrast a friendly and companionable sound. Time was when every barn housed its tutelary Owl, and builders in our fathers' day would leave a small hole under the eaves, known as the Owl-hole, to admit the feathered mouser. In summer the Barn Owls quarter new-mown hayfields like a setter to pick up the field-mice which have been disturbed by the mowers, and often in the gloaming of an autumn evening they are seen beating the hedgerows, swooping, now and again, on noiseless wings to take a mouse, those wings so softly feathered that their beating can neither distract the attention of the hunter nor the hunted.

When a Brown Owl nests hardby a country lane or woodland track the country people are often afraid to pass that way at night, and many stories tell of the fierceness of their attacks on passers-by when they have young. The company of the birds is easily gained if one can imitate

their brave call, "Hoo, hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hooo!" when all the Hooters within hearing distance will answer, and several may be drawn to trees overhead. When the Brown Owl ventures abroad by day, it is certain to have to suffer the indignity of being mobbed by smaller birds: Titmice cry "tit-tit" at the sight of it, Jays chatter, Wrens sound their rattles, Mistle-Thrushes scold, and the Magpie puts itself at the head of the rabble of teasers. Some country people consider the Brown Owl to be a weather prognosticator; if it be merry at dawn this betokens a fine day, and if merry in the evening a quiet night, whereas its "Too-wit, too-who," uttered by day, is a token of storms. An old-time naturalist bid us beware if the Owl calls in French (*Huée*), for fickle weather is then to be expected.

When Owls are heard hooting as night gives way to day, the lines of Coleridge may come to mind, "And the Owls have awakened the crowing Cock," a true poetical observation.

A gamekeeper has a grievance against

the "Horned Owl" in that it buffets his young Pheasants as they go to roost at nightfall, either viciously or playfully knocking them from their perches. This so called "Long-eared Owl" has several aggressive habits. Sometimes it flies suddenly from its lurking-place so closely to the keeper's head that it seems intent on buffeting him, and will smartly clash its wings in demonstration. Another trick is to fly to the ground, there stretching its wings and uttering a startling scream. The keeper declared it sleeps by day literally with one eye open. Dozing by day on the branch of a fir, with body close to the trunk, it irresistibly suggests a great cat. The smooth, brown and buff feathers might be the fur of a beautiful wild cat, and the eyes are cat-like, bright orange-yellow, fiery and round. The illusion is heightened when the bird raises its ear-tufts. It has a curious habit of stretching its body while it peers downwards from the fir-branch. As a mouser, it excels the cat, preying on mice, rats and voles, besides small birds and beetles. It is an early nester, but the nest is not easily discovered, as it sits close, and may even allow itself to be handled. For

nest it makes content with an old nest of Sparrow-Hawk, Wood-Pigeon, Crow, Jay or Magpie, or with a squirrel's drey—possibly having eaten the baby squirrels. The call is a slow “hoo-hoo-hoo,” while a mewling cry may be heard coming from the nest. We best know the bird as a winter visitor, living recluse in thick firs, where its plumage beautifully blends with the trunks, so that it is rarely seen until it begins to hunt at dusk.

To southern shores late in May comes the beautiful swift-flying Hobby, like a miniature Peregrine, but longer in proportion in the wings, and having longitudinal marks on the breast where the grown Peregrine has transverse bars. It may be the latest of summer bird visitors, not nesting, in another's old nest, until the middle days of June. This daring little Falcon is so marvellously swift that it will take a swallow on the wing, but it lives mainly on such fare as beetles and grasshoppers, and it is sorry sight to behold its pretty, twelve-inch long form, slate-grey

above, with buff tones on the under parts, on a gamekeeper's gallows.

Flocks of the parrot-like Crossbills occasionally reach our shores in autumn and winter, and there is always a hope that a few may stay to nest in woods of pine and fir, to which they are high ornaments with their bright crimson or orange feathers. As gymnasts they almost rival Titmice when they attack fir-cones for the seeds, holding them the while under their claws as the crossed bills, strong and efficient tools, do their work with ease and certainty. When a flock is feeding with zest, the fir-cones come pattering down like a shower of acorns.

About the Cornfields

DAY after day the same wild creatures haunt the same fields. The timid hare creeps where she crept yesterday on your approach, to leave the field by one well-known route, and return to her form by another; the same Snipe we saw last week rises from the same marshy corner; the same two hundred Lapwings feed, and fly, and wail about one fallow for days together. At a casual glance nothing may be seen but soil and flint. Presently it is as if a stone has walked, and if the two hundred birds rise, to tour in the sky, when they settle their tones blend again so perfectly with soil and flints that they are instantly lost to view. Open fields show no more fascinating bird-picture than the courting rites and flights of the wanton Lapwings, as they rise into the air, to tumble and turn, and zigzag down to the ground and flash aloft again, sometimes, unless the eye be deceived, actually turning on their backs. These frolics may be observed on moonlight nights. As the great flocks

wheel and dip through March days, spring is in their cries, be they never so plaintive and wistful. As in April they soar, dive, twirl and tumble above their eggs, their speed would seem to be unequalled by the most aërial of birds, in spite of their curiously rounded wings, and the manner of flight which earned the name, Lapwing. Model lovers though they may be, their wing-play justifies the poet's phrase, "wanton Lapwing." Now that the eggs are protected, as they deserve, from the gourmet, their main danger lies in the roller and the harrow, as noticed by a poet who gave the bird its Scottish name, Tenchat, in a song about a lad so engrossed in making his whistle that,

He never heard the Tenchat when the harrow
 broke her eggs ;
He missed the craggit Heron nabbin' puddocks
 in the sedge.

One of the most beautiful of all the idylls of the fields in spring is the courtship of the Partridge. Through spring and summer the birds of a pair live a life as one. They take good time over their nesting ;

one small area may be their daily haunt, and they will make many experimental rubbings for nests in the hedge-rows, whether or not they consider the dangers to be faced from stoats, weasels and foxes, or Crow and Hawk. Side by side they roam their little domain, and as spring goes on the cock makes more and more fuss over its mate, calling to her constantly, and finding her food, while its plumage becomes more shining: few birds are smarter than a bridegroom Partridge. As they are chivalrous to one another, so their devotion to their young is exemplary. From courting days in January until the eggs hatch in June, thence onwards until the coveys are scattered in autumn, possibly until far through the winter until it is even time to pair again, the devoted cock is ever beside its mate and on guard over the family. When the brood flies, one parent goes ahead and one behind. The sitting hen sits so closely that she will almost allow herself to be touched by hand, as, indeed, will a Pheasant when the eggs are at hatching-point. And the cock will rear the brood if any evil overtakes its mate: keepers say, it can do everything for the chicks

but lay eggs. The parents' task seems easy beside that of the Pheasant with her feckless chicks, since Partridge chicks at a few days old can keep a good look-out for dangers above and around them; at a fortnight they can fly a little, and at ten weeks are nearly full-grown. From first coming into the world they seek the food they eat, quickly understanding how to scratch at ant-heaps, while the parents cluck encouragement, and are ever ready to play the pathetic trick of tumbling about as if hurt, to entice danger from their brood.

The red-legged Partridge has earned the reputation of lacking in sporting qualities, in that it prefers to run rather than fly when pursued; a covey may be followed from the lower slopes to the summit of high chalk hills, and will run all the way. When flushed, the Partridges differ from our birds in that they do not rise as one, and often one will settle shortly on some near rail or post; or if the covey takes to its legs it scatters to right and left. In language, habits and plumage they differ from our brown birds. They are less

associated with farms, since they like to haunt uncultivated land. And they lack the sentimental romance which attaches to our bonny brown birds, since as settlers their history is short. Those who know partridges can distinguish the Red-legs from the Britishers by the difference in the whirring of their wings in flight, as well as by their voices. In winter it has often been observed that a sudden snow-storm proves baffling to the birds, as they cannot run in soft snow, but lie low, like the hares, and permit a near approach. When viewed against snow their beauty is revealed to full extent, the coral-red legs, beaks and eye-ring, the variegated flanks in lavender, grey, white, black and chestnut, the white black-banded throat, and the evenly-brown back.

The Yellow Hammer, with its bright yellow crest, throat and breast, is one of our gayest birds in plumage, and one of our most praiseworthily persistent singers, favouring us with its simple ditty, rendered by the Scotch as “ De’il, de’il, de’il tak’ ye,” from April on through all the heat of the

dog-days—a song, as we hear it from a cornfield's hedge, in tune with a drowsy August afternoon. It is a favourite, as its quaint country names seem to testify, Golden Gladdie, and Yellow Yowley ; but one wonders how any association arose between the handsome bird and the evil being supposed to supply it with drops of its blood ; possibly the curious scrawls on the eggs, like outlandish writing, suggested works of darkness. An old rhyme of reproach addressed to this “ Devil's bird ” runs :

Half a puddock, half a toad,
Half a Yellow Yorling ;
Drink a drap o' the de'il's blood
Every May morning.

Often we see it perched on the hedge, in its bright yellow plumage, as if enjoying a sun-bath, and waiting to evoke our admiration of its colours or its song ; when it flies, it shows the white tail-feathers and tawny wing-coverts.

The Corn-Bunting seems to take a lazy pleasure in the sunshine drenching a corn-field, and its splintered notes are in harmony

with the spirit of a drowsy afternoon. In summer it leads a solitary life, taking up a vantage-point on some high twig in a hedge-row, or on a telegraph wire, and making a picture of idle ease as it there perches for long spells. Though it opens the song with a will, it seems to lack energy to sing it to a finish, and it fades away in a confused medley of notes; a song like a Yellow Hammer's which has been abruptly broken off. The flight is lazy and laboured and the bird does not trouble, on a short voyage, to tuck in its legs.

When the wild roses begin to open in the hedges, we have a sign of spring's passing, and almost with the first field-roses the Nightingale's song of songs changes to a croak, and many another warbler, having young, greets us with harsh warnings and scoldings, while strange and unfamiliar chirpings sound from the young in every hedge. Summer at last established, the stridulous cry of the Land-Rail haply may ring through the cornfield, though this grows a scarce bird in southern parts of England. "Crake—crake!"—morning

and evening the cry goes up continuously, and far into still summer nights: rough music after the vernal songs.

Remarkably shy and retiring, swift of foot and elusive, the Land-Rail rarely shows itself, finding perfect concealment as it skulks in growing corn, and seldom flying unless urgently compelled. Its shape is well adapted for speedy passage through densely-growing stems, the shape of a wedge, and as it runs it extends the head and neck as if to make a way clear for the body. The hope of viewing it is to lure it forth by an imitation of its monotonous, ventriloquistic cry, perfectly to be rendered by working a quill across the teeth of a fine comb. If put up by a dog it goes away with down-hanging legs and so lethargic a flight that a sharp spaniel may catch it on the wing; one wonders how it summons the energy to cross the Channel, and it is possible that a few stay in this country, instead of heading for Africa, through the winter.

Even more shy and skulking is our resident Water-Rail, a haunter of reedy and rushy places, whence in spring its loud clamour is heard, somewhat suggesting a

groaning ; if forced to rise, it flies heavily with hanging legs. " Brook-runner " is a local name, as on occasion it will run over floating plants. The word Rail is traced to the cry, from *raller*, to rattle in the throat.

Once in a while the reaping-machine disturbs a Quail from the sanctuary of the cornfield, the smallest of our game-birds, and one likely to be mistaken for an immature Partridge ; but there is no mistaking the shrill whistling, quickly repeated three times, whence arose a specific name, *dactylisonans*. Another name, *Coturnix*, also suggests the sound of those pleasant notes, neatly rendered by the phrase, " Wet-my-lips." Though Quail in general leave us to winter in Africa, a few may linger through the winter in the warm west country.

To Pilomel the next, the Linnet we prefer.

DRAYTON.

Walking over the stubbles in autumn, we have pleasant company in the drifting

flocks of Linnets, and observe again their habit of passing and re-passing any disturber of their peace before heading away on wheeling dipping flight, with the sweet alarm-calls which possibly suggested their names, traced also to *Linum*, Flax, from the birds' delight in the seeds. Food is plentiful in the fields, seeds of dandelion, thistle, rape and the like. The Linnets may well be the happy, care-free birds they seem when at the close of a serene autumn day a flock settles on a tree to preen and plume feathers before roosting, and suddenly one and all lift up their voices in a touching evening anthem, filling the air "with their sweet jargoning." Their evensong seems to express contentment, inspired by good feeding in the stubbles, with no harm from Sparrow-Hawks, a sort of blessing on a day well spent.

In full nuptial plumage, with blood-red forehead, chestnut-brown back, white wing and tail feathers, and a lovely splash of carmine on the breast, the Linnet is remarkable as making this display of wedding finery without moulting, since it is made apparent by the wearing away of covering feathers. It is a bird so ready to

fly, and fly fast, that its beauty is elusive, and, unless viewed through a field-glass, when observed at close quarters, as from one side of a little dew-pond as it bathes on the other, cannot be seen as the gallant figure it cuts in its mate's eye. Individuals differ much, perhaps according to age, in brilliance of colour. The nesting affairs make a charming idyll, and nothing could exceed the devotion of a pair. If the bird of the carmine breast is content merely to encourage the nesting-labours of the other with ceaselessly-twittered advice, it never fails to dance attendance. When the first egg is laid, all day it will hover about the nest, as if gloating over the treasure. Through the sitting days it sings without end, often calling at the nest to greet its mate with a peculiar whistle, a melodious "To-hoo," which may be interpreted as a kind of tender enquiry, "All's well?"—a love-call as sweet as any note of bird's throat.

A handsome winter bird visitor is the little Brambling. It consorts with Chaffinches which seem to make it welcome as

they roam o'er fields and fallows in their eternal quest for seeds. Bramblings are especially fond of beechmast, and will frequent a few fruitful beeches for weeks. They are as pretty as the Chaffinches themselves, with their glossy black, white, and buff tones, their reddish-orange throats and breasts, and wings tinted in black, fawn, orange and yellow ; by the sign of their white rumps they are at once distinguished from their Chaffinch friends when in flight. Bramblings are associated with hard winters, which usually bring great numbers to our shores. In the evenings, their lively twittering, as they settle to roost, makes a pleasant winter concert.

In winter the corn-stacks become as good a vantage-point to the bird-watcher as a downland dew-pond in the height of summer, or a quiet woodland pool where the shy warblers go to drink. Rooks come to the stacks, and with excited cawing and wing-flapping pull forth the straws from which, as they wisely know, they may beat out grain. In the wake of flocks of Finches and Buntings comes the Sparrow-Hawk.

A rabbit may learn to know the comfort of a hole at the base of a rick, and the fox nightly prowls round for the rats—the fox which is king of all rat-catchers.

By Stream and Lake

Shallow rivers, to whose falls,
Melodious birds sing madrigals.

FROM an old stone bridge spanning the River Otter any constant wayfarer may always see the same charming pictures of wild life. He will pause to look for an old trout never far away, and will hope to see the otter which would be appropriate to the waters. A Kingfisher's nest-hole is within a yard of the bridge, and almost at every crossing the wayfarer hears its shrill cry, and sees the flashing of the turquoise back. He may cross the bridge ten times a day, and always find a Dipper among the shallows, though they say that Dippers and Kingfishers will not live in amity. Seeing a Dipper perched on a small stone, looking intently into the water, it gives the impression that it is admiring the reflection of its snowy breast. Should it be absent there is sure to be a Grey Wagtail flitting about with the quintessence of grace. The bridge has its own sentinel Wren which nests in the ivy of the arch,

and its own Robin which has acquired some acrobatic skill in running along the ledges. A quiet watcher by the stream may chance to see a Heron drowsing, on one long leg, after a hearty feast, if not on fish and eels, on water-voles, mice, or frogs; a cautious approach may testify that it is truly asleep, but often it appears to be drowsing when keenly alert and waiting for a fish to be speared with a lightning-like thrust of the bill.

Or a picture is gained of a Moorhen sitting on her reedy bed; we glimpse her red bill, yellow-tipped, and she shows her green legs, as green as water-weeds, to good effect as she takes her daily airings in the meadow, marching with measured steps, and flirting her tail to show the snowy under-coverts—we may even glimpse her daring red garters.

When, like a bird of the Orient, seven inches of living azure light, the Kingfisher flashes by, Britain's most brilliant bird, it is hard to define its iridescent beauty. The upper parts, from the crown of the head to the tip of the short tail, are of turquoise

blue or emerald green ; from the beak below the eye, cutting athwart the green, is a rufous streak, giving way to white below the ear-coverts. Chin and throat are yellowish white ; breast and underparts, rufous, deepening towards the tail. The small feet are pink. The long, straight beak is a spear for killing small fish, minnows or sticklebacks, fish rarely longer than four inches, suitable to be swallowed whole.

This is the pattern of an angler. Like the fly-fishing Butcher-bird or the Fly-catcher it waits, as it perches on a stake-top in the stream, or on the branch of a tree for its prey, as patient as a Heron, and when it dives it is swifter than a Tern, buoyantly rising with its catch to flash away to its nest or watch-tower.

Pugnacious by disposition, Kingfishers keep themselves to themselves. Winter often sends them down-stream to river estuaries. We associate them with rivers, as they are so faithful to flight above the water, following the river's every curve, as if in love with their reflections. But perhaps their true element is the rocky sea-coast, and many make for the sea in winter as if following retiring fish. Never

do the sea-blue birds appear more radiant than when flashing from a Cornish cave, and along the sea's margin, sunshine bringing out all the iridescent qualities of their blues and greens, and glinting on their feathers of copper and gold.

It is a lucky day when from the old fern-covered bridge spanning the River Otter five or six fledglings are seen, perched in a line on a branch overhanging the river, waiting for their parents to come with fish. One marvels at the sudden change they have experienced, from their dark, dank nest-hole and their bed of fish-bones, where they donned their shining raiment, to the exquisite beauty of the river scene.

The word Dipper conjures instantly a vision of a Highland burn or a Devon trout-stream, and a dark bird, like a large Wren with a white bib, on a stone in mid-stream, vigorously jerking its tail, then fearlessly walking into the water, and making its way below the surface. On the wing, it follows every turn of the stream, not cutting corners. It is among our few birds which may be classed as

true winter singers. It ever keeps a brave heart, and in the annals of the birds of Devon are stories of Dippers singing, on bitter winter days, as they floated downstream on blocks of ice. The song has in it the sound of water gurgling among pebbles, as has the Redbreast's. Carrington, the Dartmoor poet, touches on this idea in some lines about "the cheerful bird that loves the stream," telling how, on hearing the stream's voice, it answers in like strains, "murmuring deliciously." One secret of its cheerfulness may be that it lacks no food the year round. On some wild northern moorlands the Dipper and the Wren may be the only small resident birds seen in November, and the two have something in common, in appearance, in quick movements, in their nests (the Dipper's on a rocky ledge, under a waterside bank and sometimes behind a waterfall, the spray of which must be braved at each visit) and in their brave songs of winter.

All Wagtails are distinguished, as if members of the avian aristocracy. The exquisite grace of their movements suggests

dancing, and they trip as daintily over the boulders and pebbles of a stream as on a shaven lawn. The Grey Wagtail is the liveliest dancer of them all, on the ground or in the air, when in curving flight, or, in spring, hovering to utter a Swallow-like song. It lives in beautiful places, and is faithful to our streams the year round.

It deserves to rank as the most elegant bird in Britain. The name might suggest a Quaker-like costume, and does scant justice to the Canary-gold of the male's breast, and its daring velvet-black gorget of summer. Of its eight inches of length about half is taken up by the remarkable, brownish-black tail, with outer feathers white, a tail in perpetual motion; we observe how it is expanded after flight to a rock in the stream, displaying the white feathers. A long, slender, shapely bird, in delicately harmonised hues, it displays all the highest graces of the Wagtails to perfection.

As the Martlet has lent itself to the crest of Sussex, so the Grey Wagtail might be emblem of Devon, where it is at home by every stream, ditch and pond, especially on the moorland streams and rills. It has

common interests with the Dipper, and when the one is at home the other will not be far away. Like the Dipper, these Wagtails will nest hard by waterfalls, and often under overhanging rocks or bridge-arches. At home on every stretch of some waters, they add a rare grace and liveliness to the scene as they flit lightly in quest of water-insects. All day, the birds of a pair are seen side by side in summer, flying for a few yards in an undulating way which suggests wayward pleasure, or featly footing it over rocks and floating water-weeds. While the favourite haunt is the stream, now and then one is seen emulating a habit of the Pied Wagtail, nimbly running on the roof of byre or barn. The shrill "tweet, tweet" call-note is repeated emphatically if there be cause of alarm to send the birds from the stream, whither they quickly return. But they also have a habit of standing still if taken by sudden surprise, allowing one to pass close by before the indignant alarm-call is heard as they vanish.

To rapid, rocky streams comes in April the Sandpiper, home from Africa. Lively

and restless, it runs nimbly on the water's edge with dainty steps, or over the leaves of water-lilies in lakes, swinging its tail and bobbing its head, and uttering a melodious whistle—"Wheet, wheet, wheet!" A good swimmer and diver, it may escape a Hawk by diving, and its young if disturbed disappear instinctively in the water. The flight is graceful but peculiar, and as the birds skim the surface they fly in so wavering a style that it seems they are in danger of falling into the stream.

In April, the Sedge-Warblers return to their reedy haunts, plunging into the cover of the herbage, and thenceforward by day or night pouring out their babbling, scolding songs, in which we think we hear the notes of many birds, and often scolding themselves or some fancied foe with a deep churring. These restless, vivacious, noisy sprites of the sedges, always alert and on the move, seldom give us a fair view of their slender forms. Late-comers to the stream are their cousins, the Reed-Warblers, which weave their deep, cup-shaped nests around three (or four) reeds. These river

Warblers, since they pour out their musical chatter at night, are sometimes given the credit of being Nightingales. While Reed-Warblers are especially devoted to reed-beds, the Sedge-Bird appears in unexpected places, as in plantations at a distance from water, at times taking to playing at hide-and-seek among corn-stems.

The Reed-Warbler has a double in the scarce Marsh-Warbler, a more melodious minstrel, and bolder in its delivery. It will build its nest of grass-stalks in herbage near water, sometimes in a clump of meadow-sweet or cow-parsnip.

The humblest member of the reed-bed's choir, the player of the triangle, is the Reed-Bunting, with its reedy song of several notes, the last one prolonged, but they are uttered with praiseworthy persistency as it clings to a swaying reed. Disturbed by a wayfarer, it flies a little way and perches, flies again if pursued, but soon darts back whence it came.

Our Buntings have been called "the melancholy tribe," being birds of somewhat listless attitudes, repeating monotonous

notes, which is true even of our handsome Yellow Hammer, but especially of the Corn Bunting, which sits so dejectedly, flies so lazily with dangling legs, and utters such wheezing notes. The Reed-Bunting is a little sprightlier than the others, and seems to have acquired some liveliness of movement from the dancing of the reeds beneath its feet. This Water-Sparrow, as it was named from its Sparrow-like form, carries its black-topped, white-ringed head with an air when its sober-hued mate broods over five purplish-brown eggs in her cradle in the sedges; the cock indeed is quite the dandy with its neat white collar. Though shy and exclusive birds, pairs are seen plentifully in summer by the sides of streams beset with reed and sedge. They are water-lovers, and even at times wade into water. Activity is their key-note; they seldom sit still, like the Corn-Bunting, but go flitting incessantly from reed to reed, clinging featly, though the reeds bend beneath their weight nearly to the water. When alarmed, as a sudden drop is made into the reeds, the tail is momentarily expanded, and one glimpses the white markings.

An old pollard-willow by the stream-side is a favourite nesting-site of the Tree-Sparrow, a bird in several respects superior to the vulgarian House-Sparrow. It is recognized by wearing a neat brown cap, an adornment of either sex, by dark spots in the centre of the white cheek-patches, and by double bars on the wings. The vulgarian Sparrow rears brood after brood from February onwards ; but the smaller, less assertive if superior Tree-Sparrow parents are content with one or two broods, reared in quiet places remote from houses, and from the brawling House-Sparrow's company. Several pairs of Tree-Sparrows will nest in close association. They have sharper, shriller chirps and notes than the House-Sparrow, though otherwise of the same sort, and in nesting-days the cock attempts a more song-like chirruping. In winter these birds come to the farmer's stacks, and in small flocks will associate with various other Finches. Seen beside the House-Sparrow, the Tree-Sparrow is almost aristocratic, and wears a more dapper black scarf than its vulgar relation, one running down the throat to a point.

On the bank of the stream is the Mallard's nest, loosely built of leaves, such as dead oak-leaves, and grasses, with a downy lining whereon may be a dozen of the greenish-grey eggs. The sitting duck is attended by the drake until he is forced to go into retirement by reason of the oncome of what is called the annual "eclipse." Then the rich bridegroom-plumage is rapidly shed, the quill feathers moult, costing the power of flight : now in imminent peril, the proud bird must needs hide. The moult begins in May or June, and by August a costume is donned much of the colour of the duck's, if a trifle darker. Not until mid-October does the bird reassume the brilliant bridegroom's habit. The glossy green feathers of the head and neck, the white ring where the neck runs to body, the chestnut breast, the splashes of peacock-blue on the wings, the black tail-feathers, the four middle ones up-curling, make it the most resplendent of all our wild-fowl (though some would give the palm to the active little drake Teal).

By the next month, ducks and drakes are in pairs, and the Mallard's quacking and courteous and perpetual bowing shows the

ardour of the courtship which then begins. It is one of the strangest stories in all the book of our bird life.

Many and fair are the resting places these islands offer to Mallards, whether home bred or migrants which come to us in winter. But any leviathan pike is a deadly enemy to the ducklings. Hence arose the notion of making artificial young ducks, built up of feathers, as "bird-flies," in which some old-time anglers put their faith.

Mallards are of the class of surface-feeding ducks, but also like to resort to cornfields at dusk, there to feed at night, passing the day resting afloat, and making their toilets, and courting and skirmishing with rivals. On the darkest December day the drake is still the lover before all, swimming devotedly beside the chosen one—usually the Mallard is monogamous—and bowing to her in the most gallant way.

On Norfolk broads, from January onwards for a month the incessant quacking of the Mallards, from about ten o'clock at night until dawn, is enough to make the night sleepless for anyone within earshot. When resting by day on a calm blue sea,

they make an entrancing bird-picture, with their lustrous colours.

From some favoured lakes arises in summer a harsh cry—"Kek, kek!"—the voice of the Great Crested Grebe, a bird not uncommon now on large reedy lakes, and well known in Richmond Park. If peculiar-looking, it is very attractive, especially when still water reflects the straight neck, the boat-shaped body, the dark upper parts, the silky white of the throat, the quaint ruff and the double crest. The floating nest is fashioned of sedges and aquatic plants, wherein the birds take turns in sitting on their four or five rough eggs. Leaving the nest, they are careful to cover the eggs with weeds, thus at once hiding their treasures, and keeping in the warmth of the nest, a hot-bed of sodden herbage. The eggs, thus covered, may be left safely for hours. A charming picture is seen when the chicks make their parents tow them across the pond by gripping the parental feathers in their bills (feathers they are in the habit of eating), seek shelter under their wings, or, in the

way of Cygnets and Dabchick, mount their parents for merry pickback rides.

The lake in mid-winter has its regular bird patrons. Hereon may float Mallards, fifty or a hundred strong. Tufted Duck in companies rest in the shallows, or dive expertly and swim low in the water. Formerly known best as winter visitors, now they freely nest on our hospitable waters, and are among the most abundant of our diving ducks. Pochards, which London children call Copper-nobs, have also increased as residents, and are marked lovers of fresh water with reedy beds. In winter as in summer the lake is enlivened by the bald-faced Coots, also expert divers, going under water for aquatic plants, insects and molluscs, and searching the land for worms. Besides Moorhens there may be a few Little Grebes, with their trick of suddenly diving with scarcely any troubling of the waters, bringing Shakespeare's lines to mind,

A di-dapper peering through a wave,
Who, being looked on, ducks as quickly in.

Other birds often visit the lake in winter, perhaps a few Golden-Eye, the old males showy in black and white, with golden eyes and white cheek-patches, sometimes named "Whistlers" from the curious whistling of their pinions. The most beautiful little Teal are here, other fresh-water lovers, which like to doze away the sunny hours. Wigeon, among the most abundant ducks which come to us in winter, may appear. Their loud, clear "whee-ou" whistle is a music which comes and goes like the wind as a company sweeps by, and returns, on multitudinous wings. Whooper Swans may occasionally stay for a day, making a glorious picture as they fly in, in a long, undulating line, with their wild, bugle-like calls. These are our largest water-fowl. Their bills are adorned with yellow patches, but they are not to be compared to the deep orange bill of the Mute Swan, with its prominent black tubercle.

In the third springtime of its life the young male Swan, the Cob, takes a wife, the faithful Pen. These old names are traced to the Anglo-Saxon word "copp,"



STREAM BIRDS.

Heron.

Kingfisher.
Moorhen.

Dipper.

Mallard.
Grey Wagtail.

for a crown or the male Swan's knob at the base of the bill, and to the word "penne," a reference to the female's habit of "busking," or arching her pen-feathers. The twain are great lovers, and reputed to be faithful for life, ever beside one another, and often exchanging caresses. In the nesting-time, the Cob collects the reeds for the nest, and dutifully sits on the eggs while the Pen once a day goes off to feed. It is a majestic figure of wrath if danger threatens, as it shakes its wings, throws back the head, and hisses like a snake, or rushes across the water, churning the spray. Proud as are the birds, food subdues them, hence the favourite picture of Swans feeding from fair hands. At the Swannery at Abbotsbury, in Dorset, hundreds of the royal birds will answer the swanherd's dinner whistle like tame ducks. In flight, the Swans give us perhaps the most majestic of all our bird pictures. Though named the Mute Swan, the male of the common Swan of our rivers has a trumpet-like voice.

In autumn many birds settle on winter quarters, and some, like Blackbirds and Robins, having found a demesne to their

liking, drive away members of the family which have yet to cut their apron-strings. Swans seem to mark out boundaries in their wintry Edens, and though a family may keep together in winter, it haunts its favourite reach of water, and other families must beware of intruding ; later, the Cygnets are given marching orders. The Swan is a monarch among birds, and fears no foe. Tradition has it that even the Eagle cannot penetrate the shield of its mighty wings.

Over the Hills

There are homilies in Nature's works worth all the wisdom of the schools, if we could but read them rightly ; and one of the most pleasant lessons I ever received in a time of trouble was from hearing the note of a Lark.

WASHINGTON IRVING.

ON the South Downs there is music all the way for travellers' joy. There's the wind in the bents ; there may be the surge of the sea ; there should be the tinkling of sheep-bells. When with mid-summer bird-song dies down in the woods of the Weald, on the high downs singing-time is extended. Larks pour out their floods of " melodious madness " for nine out of the twelve months, Meadow-Pipits in petty emulation soar and sing everywhere, Whitethroats also, and the chimes of the Willow-Wrens fall without end from the may-bushes. In contrast to the airy song of the Linnet in the furze is the guttural chatter of Magpies. In these lonely solitudes we hear the songs of many hermit birds, Wrens, Robins and Thrushes which avoid houses and neighbourhoods.

The Stonechat makes itself a favourite with all lovers of the Downs, with its pleasant habit of flitting ahead of a wayfarer to alight on a topmost twig of a furze-bush, wagging a tail and chattering to explain its name. So the white-rumped Wheatear flits on the ground before us. The Whinchat, the Dartford Warbler, the Cirl Bunting and the Yellow Hammer nest in the furze and bramble.

Its nest among the gorses,
And its song in the star courses.

E. B. BROWNING.

The Sky-Lark bears the name "*Alauda*," believed to be from a Celtic word meaning great, or high songstress, and in Italian it is "*Allodola*," "the one who gives praise." No name could be more fitting when, with the new year, the Larks begin the songs they will bestow so abundantly through the year—not even the Redbreast gives us fuller measure of song, and in summer the Lark sings by starshine, soaring as if to look for the sun while he is yet far below the horizon, seeking its "privacy of glorious light." It soars until it is

invisible, "and rain-like music scatters from on high," and the marvel is, that the soaring is not like that of a bird of prey, but is accomplished by the continuous effort and action of the wings, with the voice in accompaniment, so that we are impressed by the minstrel's vigour and power of purpose. The name, Lark, is a contraction of "Laverock," which has been interpreted as "a crafty worker," suggesting some legend, happily forgotten, of the Lark as a bird of omen, perhaps hinted at in a Spanish name, "*Zurriaga*," "the scourge which inflicts punishment."

Shelley sang of the Lark's unpremeditated art, but some naturalists are inclined to think it sings by the book. Some, hearkening to the song, claim that without seeing the singer they know by its varying strains if it be ascending, stationary, or on the descent. According to Dyer's "English Folk-lore," in the north of England country people sing, if you would know what Larks say, you must lie on your back and listen, and you will hear,

Up in the lift go we
Tehee, tehee, tehee, tehee !—

and a more ambitious poet renders the song as

Ecce ! suum *tirili, tirili, tirilirliri* tractim
Candida per vernum cantat alauda solum.

Some say the song opens with a prelude "vivace crescendo," which carries the singer to its watch-tower in the skies on a motive of impatience; then the song becomes "moderato," and in shorter phrases becomes a "fantasia." While hovering, a note of contentment rules the airy strains. The rapture dies away as the melody sinks with the descent. Some think that the notes are of the number of the wing-beats, and accord therewith.

About the third week of March shepherds of the South Downs expect the first of our truant summer birds which returns to those solitudes, the Wheatear, a true shepherd's bird and companion, keeping him company on the lonely sheep-walks. It cuts a handsome figure in its coat of bluish-grey feathers with its white eye-stripe, and black wings, and flashing white rump, like a House-Martin's. Its habit is to flutter along before the wayfarer, turning

its head from right to left as it goes, and it is given to perching on stone walls and rocks, flicking its tail. If there is a nest in a rabbit burrow, the parent birds have the habit of flying round about the spot if disturbed, and, according to one wise old shepherd, the nest will be in the centre of the circle they describe. The sharp call-note is like the sound of two pebbles striking, and the male has a quiet little love-song, sometimes uttered on the wing. The origin of the name has been much questioned; in one suggestion the old meaning is given to *ear*, to plough, since the Wheatear arrives when the ploughing and sowing of spring wheat is in progress. The birds, we may note, are at their fattest when the wheat is in the ear; and it was then when old-time shepherds of the Downs trapped them in horsehair nooses, one shepherd's record amounting to the appalling total of eighty-four dozen in a day. All who love the solitude of the Downs have an affection for the pretty birds.

The Stonechat is the feathered harlequin

of the Downs, most gaily painted and distinctive, a study in contrasting hues with its black head, red breast and touches of white on the wing. It seems to like to show off its fine feathers, perching, very erect, on the summit of a furze-bush, though there be few to admire in a lonely downland haunt. True, it never sits still for long, but flits restlessly about on an eternal quest for insects, and is cautious and nervous if we try to view it at close quarters, making constant complaint by notes like the sound of pebble striking on pebble. When assured that danger is over, having artfully decoyed intruders from the nest in the heart of a furze, it will spring to hover in the air, uttering the few low, pleasing notes which make the song. The French name it "Shepherd's Mill-clapper," and the Germans, "Black-throated Stone-kisser."

Alike to the Stonechat, in haunts, habits, and character, is the Whinchat of the Downs, a bird not so gay as the other in plumage, but uttering a superior song, low and sweet, sometimes while in the air; a

distinguishing mark is the bold eye-stripe, white on the male, yellowish on his mate. They repeat the call, "*u-tick!*" and are sometimes named after that call. An old Sussex name is "*Barley-ear*," possibly because these migrants arrive when barley is "*earing*," or when ploughing for barley goes forward. We read that in Portugal a popular name is "*Tange-asno*," literally, "*Gee-up, donkey!*" because the note is like the call of the donkey-boys when urging on their beasts.

The rare Dotterel comes in April to our south-eastern coast on its way to Highland nesting-haunts—the dolt of a bird, *morinellus*, "a little fool," so called, they say, because it imitates the movements of the fowler, as was noted in some lines by Drayton, declaring that if you creep, cower, lie, stoop, or go "So marking you with care, the apish bird doth do"—and, while thus acting, is heedless of the snare or net. And in truth the Dotterel we judge to be foolishly confiding, and it has, in common with other Plovers, a wing-stretching habit. It is a lover of high downs and moors, and

haunts plough-fields or fallows to which, as it stands on one long leg, it adds a grace, if it allows us to admire the pleasing browns and greys of the plumage, the white eye-stripes, and the warm fawn of the breast. It runs and flies with swift movements, and utters a note as soft as a Linnet's.

A choice little downland bird whose better acquaintance we could desire is the Dartford Warbler, a bird prettily painted with grey tones about the head and back, and reddish-brown on throat and breast. Though it is rarely still for a moment, and takes cover on the least alarm, it is occasionally glimpsed as it perches on a topmost spray of furze, flirting and erecting its long tail, and raising its crest, frequently mounting into the air with odd gesticulations to catch an insect. It sings a song which, though slight, is repeated in spells, and from a common note earned the French name, "Pitchou."

High-hovering over the peaceful Downs, apparently motionless save for the least

quiver of wing-tips, is the little Kestrel. When it stoops to its prey with closed wings it falls like a thunderbolt, throwing up the head and opening the wings as the talons flash forth for the kill. Often it makes a sudden swoop groundwards, then stays its course, and ascends in a wide curve, and we suppose that the mouse it aimed for has darted down a hole. It may not be easy to catch a mouse when you must come down from fifty or a hundred feet, but the Kestrel is as patient in its mouse-hunting as a cat, and has all the day for its hunting. Mice and voles, grasshoppers, cockchafers and other insects, are the chief items of its bill of fare. Now and then it will stoop for a young stoat, weasel or rat, and though at times it may hunt feathered prey, the short toes seem not adapted to taking birds. It is pleasant to hear the shrill courting cry, "Klee, klee, klee." The chalk-pits of the Downs provide suitable nesting sites, or the birds may seek out some old ruin, a hole in a lightning-stricken tree, or the old nest of Crow, Magpie, or Jackdaw. Beautiful and valuable birds, the Wind-hovers deserve our kindest protection and regard.

A few Downsmen know the haunts of the Stone-Curlew on barren uplands among scrubs and stones, and know that when it returns from its winter quarters—their whereabouts its secret—spring is not far behind. The bird is better named Norfolk Plover, being a member of the Plover family, and having Norfolk associations. It has a Plover-like bill ; the great, staring, pale yellow eyes are those of a bird of twilight ; the legs are long, and the feet lack the hind toe. It is as shy, as skulking, and as given to running, with easy graceful movement, as a Land-Rail, and is a past master of the art of lying low, squatting among the flints and chalk with which it magically blends. By its running and squatting habits it reminds the Downsman of the lamented Great Bustard formerly known to the Sussex hills. Partly nocturnal by habit, the Stone-Curlew feeds chiefly by night, when its shrill cry may be heard ; by day it is mostly silent. The young when newly hatched show a marked crouching instinct, and by their stillness, and by blending with surroundings, baffle the sharpest eyes.

To Sussex Downs there comes as a winter

visitor a somewhat rare bird, familiar to those who know Swiss valleys, the Black Redstart. Like the Redstart—in winter missing from the old walls where in summer it sang its short melodious stave, for ever flirting its tail of fire, with an up and down motion—this is an elegant bird. Its fiery tail is in contrast to the prevailing blackness, though relieved by grey, and set off by splashes of white on the dark wings. On the Continent the Black Redstart is as much at home about a house and village as our Redbreast is here, and like Robin it has a habit of posing with lowered head and slightly raised wings, while the tail is up-jerked and opened.

By the Silver Sea

And silver white the river gleams,
As if Diana in her dreams
Had dropt her silver bow
Upon the meadows low.

LONGFELLOW.

WITH August, thoughts go to seas and rivers, or where sea and river meet in a wide and peaceful estuary, white with the wings of boats and Sea-Gulls. Countrymen and Cockneys alike meet old friends at the sea when they find the Gulls in their summer quarters. The countryman recognizes those which follow the plough in winter, when their snowy feathers are in contrast to the sable hue of the Rooks—angels among imps of darkness. The London citizen well knows the Gulls, especially the so-called Black-headed, most abundant and widespread of them all, distinguished by its red bill and legs, and the chocolate-hued cap which is put on in the summer. Its cackling sort of laugh is among those sounds made by birds, like the drumming of Snipe, the churring of Nightjars, or the

whistling of Wigeon, which have for many ears a healing and enchanting quality.

With the Londoner's holiday, the long holiday of London's Sea-Gulls draws also to a close, and they soon return to Town for their winter season. When again they set sail to nest on marsh, mere, or cliffs in the days of white violets, their white wings are sorely missed ; and to a citizen on the Thames Embankment their departure may bring wistful thoughts of far silver seas. They bring messages also to the countryman in the days after harvest, when they flock to follow the plough, since their laughing cries herald storms. Countrymen say that when they soar and fly in circles, it is a sure sign of bad weather in twenty-four hours. This Gull is well-named *Ridibundus*—the Gull full of laughter.

Gulls are Gulls and nothing more to an indifferent onlooker, but the species have their strongly-marked characters, as notable as the difference in size between the Great Black-backed and the smallest nesting in Britain, the pretty Kittiwake. The Great Black-backed appears as a majestic figure when in flight, but is reputed to be as black as its back at heart,

a robber, bully, and murderer, the "Vulture of the Sea." Yet it has acquired some odour of sanctity from its rural name, the Parson Gull, the black and white plumage suggesting a parson's hood and surplice. The name may have something to do also with its lugubrious voice. This handsome bird is distinguished by its size, its black mantle, and pale, flesh-coloured feet. Nearly a yard in length, the great wings extended span more than five feet, from tip to tip. A bold, tyrannical, domineering bird, it proclaims its presence by its loud, cackling cry. The most favoured nesting-places are in northern Scotland, and a favourite site is the grassy top of a rocky islet. Besides fish, it feeds on the eggs and young of other birds, and joins the Raven to attack a dead sheep. To its credit it may be said that it is a vigilant and dutiful parent, with young well-disciplined in obeying the warning of a hoarse alarm-note.

No-one could think harm of the dainty little Kittiwake, which makes so charming a picture as it seeks the surface-fish on which it mainly relies for a living, or sails serenely on the sea, a graceful, shapely

figure. As we have a Lady Hawk, and a tree that is Lady of the Woods, this might be our Lady Gull. It cries its name, like Chiffchaff, Cuckoo, Curlew and Peewit. Faithful to our coasts at all times of the year, it is rarely seen inland. In old days Kittiwakes and other Gulls were brought to the table, and were reckoned the equal of Partridges as a dainty dish. Cornish coastguardsmen would shoot the Gulls in early autumn when they assemble in great flocks, and preserve them against the winter. When grilled, old fishermen say shamelessly, they had a rich flavour not unlike a smoked haddock's. In a favourite Scottish nesting-island, the dainty birds are seen in thousands together, perched on cliffs, or drifting over the sea; intent on family affairs, they become remarkably tame.

On some shores the Herring-Gull is the most abundant species, sometimes called Egg-Gull from its love of other sea-birds' eggs. It abounds on all coasts and estuaries through the year, and often journeys inland, where it may be hailed by the name Silver-back, from the French-grey mantle it wears: it feeds with the

Rooks behind the plough, and is a farmer's friend. In all fishing villages it makes a familiar picture, as it perches on some mast-head or other point of vantage.

The so-called Common Gull is by no means the commonest in this country, though it may be the most faithful Gull attendant on the plough. It is better fitted by its Latin name, *canus*, the hoary one, from its light-hued plumage in purest white and delicate pearl-grey, as pleasing as a Quaker's dress. It is rarely seen in summer, in England, unless in an immature state, for it travels in spring to far northern shores, lochs and rivers. This is the first of the Gulls to fly inland before the storm, when the children say :

Sea-Gull, Sea-Gull, sit on the sand,
'Tis never good weather when you're on the land.

The Terns are happily called Sea-Swallows, being of Swallow shape and fleetness, and as graceful in their wayward flight, as they flash about the margins of the waves, beautiful in their white and pearl-grey feathers: airy, buoyant creatures, they seem to embody the spirit of the

waves. They will hover like Kestrels, and when they dive, as they strike the sea, they make the foam fly. When the sea is alive with silver flashes where the herring-fry gambols, it is a rare sight to watch the Terns racing to dash among the innocents, with exultant screams. An autumn picture by the sea is composed by large flocks of Terns of different species, with young birds still taking food from their parents, gathered for the start of their voyage to the South.

Following the pilchards into the bay swoop the great white Gannets. The way of the Gannet differs from the way of any other bird-fisher. Cruising above the sea on wandering flight, circling and cutting figures like an ice-skater, it quests for such as mackerel, herrings, pilchards or sprats swimming near the surface, until it marks its fish; then rising for its dive, as if making a nice calculation of distance, it partially closes its wings and falls straightway on its prize—like a falling statue of an angel—its head striking the water with force enough to throw up spray

visible for two miles or more distant. Timing the spectacular dive, it may be found to occupy fifteen seconds. The mature birds at six years old in courting attire are splendid figures, with their straw-hued heads, blue skin-patches about the eyes, white backs and bodies, and black-tipped wings.

Through the greater part of the year we find on and off our shores the "Foolish Guillemot," certainly a bird of odd appearance as it perches upright on a rock: distinguished by the black and white hues, short neck and sharp-pointed beak. When nesting (thousands strong, in company with Razorbills, Puffins, Gulls and other seafarers) the female again cuts a quaint figure as she stands over her one large, pear-shaped egg on a ledge of bare rock during the month of incubation. But in the sea the Guillemot evokes all our admiration as it swims and dives with supreme ease and grace.

On a rock out at sea sits the Cormorant,

digesting its dinner, meantime spreading out its great wings to their widest: so it sits for half-an-hour to air and dry the outspread feathers, looking like a painted bird upon a painted sea. It is the green-eyed monster of birds, huge, sombre, ungainly, a sort of sea ogre. Presently it plunges, to swim with body deeply submerged, looking like some pirate craft; it sinks until nothing but neck and head are above the surface, suggesting then a sea-serpent. Anon it swims with head under water: but suddenly rearing itself, takes a long, deep dive, and out-swims the fish in a chase of fifty yards, for there is a fish, when it emerges, in the terrible hooked bill. It swallows its mackerel whole, tossing it into the air to make it go head-first down its great gullet. It is a sort of feathered shark.

The Cormorant has a reputation for cleverness and more, for it is a bird in which we may find human-like qualities, even, those say who have kept tame Cormorants, the glimmer of a soul. A tamed bird becomes remarkably affectionate towards those who nourish it. There is a story that, like a retriever, the trained

Cormorant—wearing a collar round its neck to prevent it swallowing a fish—will bring fish to hand when called. It seems almost a pity that the training of Cormorants for fishing has died out in this country, and that we have no longer the office of “Master of the Cormorants” which existed in the days of King Charles I.

Fishermen say that as young Cormorants grow old enough to leave the cliffs for the sea their parents carry them to the water on their backs. The nests may be in perilous sites, as the parents are not particular whether they build on high ledges of cliffs, in trees, or on low rocks. Perhaps it suggests future intelligence that the naked young are peculiarly nervous and helpless when hatched. They make an extraordinary picture when feeding on the partly-digested food brought in by the parents, as they thrust their heads and necks far down into the parental gullets.

The Shag is a lesser Cormorant, sometimes called the Green and the Crested Cormorant from the green neck and head-crest of nesting days. In early spring the mature Shag cuts a fine figure, though there is always a suggestion of uncanniness

about these birds, which may have influenced Milton to cause Satan to don a Cormorant's garb.

It is always a pleasure to watch the handsome, active little Oyster-Catcher, in its black coat and white breast, with its red legs and orange bill, as it hunts for mussels, limpets, sea-worms and marine insects, or, after feeding, stands on one leg, with the long bill tucked away under the feathers. The orange spear is a powerful instrument for attacking firmly-fixed limpets and opening shells; three inches long, compressed, it terminates in a fine vertical wedge. The bird appeals to a countryman as a sort of sea Magpie, and is happily named Sea-pie from its black and white plumage which takes the eye as a party flies low over the water, or forms up in a line on the shore, waiting for a high tide to go down. The birds are as noisy as the Redshanks of the marshes, and on the least alarm go away with a peculiar, shrill, penetrating whistle, often heard effectively on our coasts at night. Restless and shy, Oyster-Catchers seem

always in a hurry. Like Gulls, they are amphibians, and may nest far inland ; but when at sea are masters of swimming and diving. As the young grow strong, they are taken to estuaries ; and it is remarkable that in spite of their name the birds seem to abound most in places shunned by oysters, though an Irish name, Mussel-picker, is appropriate. " Oyster-Catcher " is altogether a false name if rightly traced to the Dutch word, "*ækster*," Magpie.

On Cornish cliffs as on north-western coasts we may haply see the Chough, and hear its ringing cry, a bird easily distinguished from Jackdaws, when flying in their company, by its longer wings and more buoyant and skimming flight. It is one of the beauties of the Crow family, with velvety plumage in contrast to the curved coral bill and the scarlet legs. A Cornish legend tells that King Arthur lives on as a Chough :

And mark yon bird of sable wing,
Talons and beak all red with blood,
The spirit of the long-lost king
Passed in that shape from Camlan's flood.

Shakespeare's lines may come to mind as we watch the graceful, hovering forms floating above the sea :

The Crows and Choughs that wing the midway air
Seem scarce as gross as beetles.

The sea-shore has its Dove in the Rock Dove, which calls "Coo-roo-coo," dwelling on the last syllable, a lover of rocky coasts, the supposed begetter of the Pigeons of our côtes, and distinguished by the sign of the patch of white over the tail : a charming Dove with bluish-grey head and sheeny reflections of purple and green on the sides of the neck and throat. The loud clashing of the wings is a feature of the strong flight ; on foot, the Dove bows as it walks. In winter, it joins forces with others, forming vast flocks. It has the reputation of pairing for life. The invariable clutch of two eggs gave rise to the Scottish saying, "a doo's cleckin," for a family of two—boy and girl.

The Rock-Pipit, the Sea-Titling, carries

on by the sea the tradition of the Pipits of the meadows and trees, singing on the wing. As the mountain stream has its own bird, the Dipper, which curiously combines the attributes of a perching bird and a diver, so the Rock-Pipit is a remarkable example of a perching bird eschewing trees, and ever faithful to rocks. Tree-tops and meadows it leaves to its cousins, attuning its little trill to the surge of the tides. It has a pleasing way of flitting to a short distance ahead of the wayfarer, with jerky flight passing from rock to rock, though we could wish it were less ready to avoid us, and to utter its distressful "cheeps" or "chinks," notes which make what there is of the song, a small effort, but pleasingly cheerful. The nest will be hidden in a cliff's cranny near the waves, or in a tuft of thrift, and built of dead grass perhaps mingled with sea-weeds and sometimes lined with hair. Sea-weeds attract the bird, as a source of flies for the eating. Quiet as is the Rock-Pipit, it gives a certain vivacity to a barren, rocky coast, as, perched on a rock, it gazes with soft eye and gentle mien at the breaking waves.

Noblest of our English raptorial birds is the Peregrine Falcon, sometimes called Cliff-Hawk since it rarely deserts the coast. In autumn there come to our shores young Peregrines from overseas which may have been following migrating Ducks—Passage Hawks, they are called. The Peregrine's habit is to fly some distance or far to seek its prey, and it seems to cause little anxiety to the Gulls, Guillemots or Jackdaws which may haunt the cliffs, but no flying bird is safe from its talons, and it spells certain death to one of a flock of Wild Duck or Wigeon when it hurtles among them like a thunderbolt. At the breeding season, the Peregrine's cry is strangely fierce and menacing. Wayfarers on cliff-tops along the south-east coast mark the noble form as it soars and swoops above the cliffs.

Winter brings the Shore-Lark to our eastern coast, where it leads a wandering life. A handsome little bird, beautifully pencilled, its head is painted in a striking contrast of black and yellow. From the base of the bill a streak of black spreads behind the eye; a broad black band on

In the Alder-Holt

A DEVOTED lover of alders and birches is the charming little Lesser Redpoll, that delicate Linnet. Often it will set its twiggy, mossy nest, lined with willow-down or the like, in an alder, while the seeds and buds of that tree and the birch are a favourite winter food. Sociable birds, like Linnets Redpolls nest near one another, so that to find one's secret may be the clue to others. Large flocks visit the alder-holt in winter, for ever climbing about the twigs questing for seeds with lively, twittering notes, and often keeping company with Titmice or Siskins. They will stay about one group of trees for days. After the moult, we miss the crimson of the cock's poll and the carmine of his breast. They give us one of the prettiest pictures of the winter calendar of bird life as they feed and play in Titmouse-like attitudes, even excelling Titmice in their partiality for feeding when upside down, and they seem in their happiest element when feeding in alders which overhang

water. When courting days come again, they spend much time in aërial exercises, taking love-flights from the tops of trees, spilling, as they fly, their clear, shrill, trilling notes—small birds of eager hearts. If doomed to captivity, Jinties, as they are called in the North, show marked affection to human friends, perching with confidence on hand or head, and learning many little tricks, like pulling up buckets of water; but are best seen in the alder-holt, flitting buoyantly about for seeds, and clinging to the least twigs. They seem as affectionate to one another as Love-Birds; several have been observed on a twig passing seeds from bill to bill, one sometimes accepting a seed from two others at once.

The alder-beds often are enlivened in winter by eager-hearted companies of Long-tailed Titmice, bringing to mind the old image, a flight of arrows; there is something quaint in the look of the midgets in grey and rose, with their tiny wings and long tails, their rounded heads and minute conical beaks. For ever through autumn and winter the families

roam in parties which keep together, and their shrill and anxious notes tell how eager is their hunting. When at last the living arrows come to their billet, they snuggle to roost in bunches, cuddling for warmth and clinging like a swarm of bees, two birds sitting so closely together that they look like one, possibly with others on their backs, the whole presenting the appearance of a mass of soft feathers.

Naturalists have long hesitated in allowing these little birds a place in the Titmouse family, since the true Tits have short tails and short and strong legs, toes and claws, and nest in holes, whereas these have tails long and graduated (three pairs of the tail-feathers differing from each other in length, and being shorter than the other pairs); legs and toes are long and slender, and the nest is the miracle we know, oval, domed, stuffed with from two to three thousand feathers, outwardly covered with lichen, and often set in the heart of a thick thorn; certainly the most wonderful nest in this country, if not of the world. It is difficult to count the exact number of feathers when examining an old nest, since the minute ones become

felted, but after counting upwards of three thousand we became deeply impressed by the amazing diligence of the tiny atoms of birds in collecting their feather bed. Where they find the feathers is a deep mystery, since the nest may be far from any visible source of supply. The most charming of pictures presented by these Titmice is that of the mother bird sitting with the tip of her fine tail poking out from the entrance-hole of the nest above her minute, eager-eyed head—a picture solving the problem of the disposal of her tail in so narrow a nest of bottle shape. Another puzzle is how the parents feed equitably twelve or more little ones in such cramped quarters.

It is in their movements where the birds are most Tit-like, as they hunt in small packs through the winter woods, playing their endless game of follow-my-leader, those before calling to those behind with chirps and twitters, now loud and shrill, then so soft that the ear scarcely catches the notes.

Among the choicest of our bird-visitors

in winter is the winsome little Siskin, a charming study in lemon and black tones. It haunts delightful places; mention of its name is enough to conjure a picture of a Sussex forest gill, with alders bordering a stream, and the birds searching for seeds in the trees in pretty Titmouse-like attitudes, all members of a flock twittering to one another as they feed. Anon they attack thistle-heads and burdocks, much after the manner of Goldfinches. Sociably inclined, they enjoy the company of such as Redpolls and Linnets and other country cousins. The skilful way they hide their nests if natives of Scotland, and building in firs or birches, gave rise to a legend, that they made the nests invisible by putting magic stones among the eggs. Siskins sing most of the year except when moulting, rapid little songs not without melody, opening with a Linnet-like phrase. These little birds do not seem well known to countryfolk; they even escaped the notice of Parson White of Selborne. The cock, with his black head in contrast to the gold and lemon hues, is a beauty even beside Goldfinches. But by bird-fanciers Siskins are much cherished, and are well

known as sweetly docile birds, with entertaining and charming habits. The cock mates freely with hen Canaries, and the hybrids are exceedingly handsome, and especially sweet singers, lively birds, spirited and proud.

On the Moors

Quoth I, Fair lass, wilt thou gang wi' me,
Where Blackcocks crow, and Plovers cry ?

THOUGHTS go to the heathery moorlands with August ; and if we follow we shall find several birds of summer keeping company with the Grouse. Far through the summer the droning of the Nightjar may be heard o' nights. Young Cuckoos may be seen. Wheatears flit about, showing white rumps. Ring-Ouzels display their white gorgets in their native cleughs and glens. By burnsidcs dance the dainty Grey Wagtails. Willow-Wrens are heard as autumn comes on, trying to recapture their spring rapture of song. Land-Rail may linger till mid-September, since the young need a long time for the growing of their quills. These are among the moor's "birds of sunshine," which presently will be setting sail for "coasts that keep the sun." Moormen see early signs of the full flood of the birds' migration from Arctic regions before the Polar night,

and woods in September are found swarming with Song and Mistle-Thrushes, Blackbirds and Ring-Ouzels. The ripe berries of the rowans stay the passing bands for a few days, offering delicious feasts. Crowning Highland hills, the trees with their birds make a beautiful September study, with their delicate branches meeting to form graceful arches, their coral berries in contrast with the Blackbirds' feathers, or the deep green of pines—berries, as Wordsworth sang, "that outshine spring's richest blossoms."

Devon people have a pleasant name for the Ring-Ouzel, in Tor-Ouzel, one bringing to mind the great tors of the moors it haunts, rejoicing in their whortleberries in midsummer. Though a bird of wild and sometimes dismal places, yet it has been observed that it is sensitive to biting winds, and likes to keep on a tor's lee-side. It is looked for at the end of March, and on Dartmoor at the end of September the broods form parties for last raids on hawthorn berries before departing to winter

somewhere by the Mediterranean. In the deep furze and heather-covered "cleaves" of Dartmoor the Ring-Ouzel is at home in summer, often nesting near the burn at the bottom, as the wayfarer knows by hearing the wild, sweet song, in harmony with the spirit of the moor, or by the chattered complaint made at his passing. The birds make frantic endeavour to drive or lure a trespasser from their haunt, flying before and settling to scold, and flying on as he draws near to another point of vantage in the heather, while their anxious cries startle the solitudes. In autumn, Ring-Ouzels from northern moors may be seen on the Hampshire and Sussex downs, where they may linger for some days, feeding about the may-bushes, before crossing the Channel. Then country people who know not the birds are surprised at their white necklets, but there is no mistaking the cousinly resemblance to Blackbirds. The Ring-Ouzels have the Blackbirds' trick of elevating the tail on settling after flight, an action without which no Blackbird comes to rest; and they cry a hearty "good-night" to the world as they go to roost.

Unaware of the meaning of "the Twelfth" the Grouse cock's challenging "Ke-bec-bec-bec-bec!" rouses the echoes of hill and glen. The many enemies of Grouse, from fox to weasel, Eagle to Magpie, tell of the abundant life of the moors, with their crowing Blackgame, whistling Curlew, Plovers plaintively wailing, and Snipe piping in the marshes. The red bird of the moors, like the Red Indians, has a reputation for giving way before civilization, and flourishing where Nature is wildest. Yet Grouse will come to farms for winter food, instead of seeking heather-tops in the snow, and will change their outlook on life if need be; thus, while birds of Highland solitudes allow a man to walk close by without alarm, those which have learnt to know a sportsman become the wariest of game-birds. But Grouse are marvellously faithful to their native heaths, and when in winter the whistle of Curlew and the wailing of Plover are heard no more, their ringing calls still greet the dawn, and for leagues around "Dwells but the Gorcock and the deer."

Young Grouse are among the most precocious of our game-birds. Hatched in

mid-May, before the month is out, when no more than a fortnight old and no larger than Sparrows, they fly manfully on their tiny wings, and at three months old they are nearly full-grown. In place of the short quills of nesting plumage they sport strong black primaries ; their feathers show the true Grouse red, save for a yellow-barred streak across the breast, and they are nearly as bold and wary as their parents. Before the autumn is far spent their courting days will begin ; they will then go in pairs, if still forming companies, and the hills will ring with their matutinal concerts. With break of day their human-like voices are heard, the nasal “ yow, yow, yow ” of the hens, answered by the lusty crows of the cocks, “ cabow, cabeck,” or a harsh, “ go-back, go-bac, bac, bac.” Another call is “ cock-away,” and these and other notes have the same inimitable quality as the “ cock-up ” crow of the Pheasant. On a par with the story of the simpleton who gave his name in answer to the Owl’s question, “ Who ? Who ? ” is a Highland tale of a man turned back from a desperate enterprise by the imperative command of the Moor-cock.

Wild and rocky glens on a fringe of a moor, where a dancing burn has cut a ravine, the sides verdant with fern, heathery and beset by birches, are a favourite haunt of Blackgame. Red Grouse are among the most precocious of game-birds, but the Black Grouse is among the tardiest in development, and for four months from hatching early in June remains a callow and tender bird of skulking habit. Red Grouse are full-grown when the Black Grouse is scarcely bigger than a Quail, and the cocks can hardly be distinguished from the hens, the young taking after the sober-hued mother-bird. When, after the first year, the cocks come into their strength, they are strikingly different from the hens, and might well be proud of their blue-black plumage, lyre-shaped tails, white-barred wings, and scarlet wattles, making them rank among the most handsome of game-birds. In mid-September they separate for awhile from the young Greyhens of their brood, lying very close in heather, bracken or rush-beds. Then a sort of spring fever assails the cocks on a sunny October day, and they make fantastic displays before the hens, to be repeated in early spring,

when the cocks assemble on their "play-grounds" at break of day, to display before and fight for the hens. As they then dance about the hens, or advance to meet rivals, the wonderful lyre-shaped tails are fully spread, the long curved feathers are turned downwards, and the wings trail while the performance is accompanied by vibrating notes and powerful calls.

On the higher slopes of Scottish mountains we find the home of the cousins of the Red Grouse, the Ptarmigan, though it is hard to see them as they crouch in their grey and rocky setting, feeding on blaeberry and crowberry. As the snow falls, they put on their winter snowy dress, all white except for the dark tail feathers and quill-shafts, and, in the male, the black streak from bill to behind the eye. The Ptarmigan stands alone among our birds in that it seems to delight in snow, and rather to fear the heat of the sun, and it is faithful to its snowy heights even when the valleys rejoice in the spring. It burrows through snow to reach food in winter, and lies to preen itself on a chilly snow-bed.

A dashing pirate of north-country moors is the little Falcon, the Merlin, the smallest of its kind in Britain—some twelve inches in length—and the bravest of the brave. A low flier, it skims above the ground with grace and ease, seeking what it may devour. Though so small, it is audacious in attacking birds of superior size and weight, Pigeons or Partridges, but it preys mostly on such as Pipits and Larks, taking its quarry either on the ground or in flight. Picking one bird from a flock, it follows it ruthlessly in every twist and turn until the talons strike home ; so it will hunt down a Snipe. Marking unsuspecting birds feeding in the open, it scuds along some hedge or bank which masks its approach, then swoops over at the most favourable place for the surprise attack. Sometimes it attacks from below. On a Sussex heath in winter one was seen skimming so near the ground as almost to touch its own shadow. Suddenly it soared aloft, to make a deadly swoop on a party of Redwings feasting on hawthorn berries. It shows a fine spirit when mobbed by smaller birds, turning like a fury on its pursuers.

In the hawking days Merlins were

favourites with the ladies, who would carry them on their wrists even to church. Scott, picturing a great lady in church, sang,

A Merlin sat upon her wrist,
Held by a leash of silken twist.

The little Falcons were trained to catch Larks, Snipe, Woodcock, and young Partridges for their cruel, if fair, mistresses. "Passing good Hawks" is the commendation they earned in the "Book of Falconrie," "and verie skilful."

The Common Buzzard maintains a residence in the west country as in Wales and Scotland, haunting wild moors and cliffs, usually hunting in pairs for prey ranging from young hares and rabbits, to rats, field-mice, moles, snakes, lizards, frogs, beetles and worms. In a buoyant, Eagle-like way, with graceful gyrations, it soars to immense heights, and floats and hovers with expanded wings and wide-spread tail, or beats the country with steady, dignified flight; it seems to sail with scarcely a movement of the wings. Faithful to one haunt and one perch, it will appear to be dozing on its perch for an hour on end. Its

melancholy cry strikes a wild note in a peaceful scene.

One unassuming little bird that attracts note on Scottish moors is the Twite, so named from its simple note—also known to the Scots as Heather or Yellow-neb Lintie, but differing from a Linnet in its longer tail, a rufous patch on the upper tail-coverts, and a yellow beak, while it differs from all in its family by nesting on the ground. In southern England it is known as a winter visitor.

Noblest of all the Highland bird-pictures is that of the Golden Eagle, whether at rest, regal in dignity, every inch the feathered monarch of the glen as “he watches from his mountain wall,” or majestically flying, climbing the air in great circles, the broad wings fully outstretched, upcurving at the tips—soaring, as we might think, for the joy of soaring, since it drops low before stooping. The flight of a fearful pack of Grouse or Ptarmigan may herald the royal bird’s approach before it is seen.

At times, a pair may be viewed, but the usual picture is of a solitary Eagle beating the mountain slopes for the sight of its prey in the heather below: a Sassenach, beholding the noble bird, may recall wistfully that time was, as Bewick relates, when Golden Eagles maintained their eyries in England.

On Marshes and Sand-Flats

IN autumn, on mysterious, far-stretching flats of marsh, mud and sand on our east coast, forlorn and beautiful, where earth and sky seem almost as one, the haunt of Gulls and Waders, it is hard to gain a close view of the wary birds, and to distinguish one Wader from another as the grey, fawn and silvery forms drift over the waste like shadowy ghost-birds. The Curlew are so wild as to be well nigh unapproachable. Dunlin will feed among Curlew, Redshanks, Godwits or Oyster-Catchers, and may be picked out by the black splash on the lower breast ; when they rise, they are at once distinguished by their lyric flight, as the flock wheels as one, now showing the dark upper plumage, then the white underparts, like a smoky cloud suddenly flashing with silvery light. We recall that in Iceland where they associate with Golden Plover they are known as "Plovers' Pages." The abundant and dainty little Ringed Plover associating with the Dunlin are known by their contrasting

hues of black and white, and grey-brown mantles, and by the sign of the black gorget. Much like the Dunlin in action are the Curlew-Sandpipers, or Pigmy Curlew, which also associate with other small Waders, tripping over the sand or mud to dibble for food with their curved bills. A small flock of Grey Plover may take the eye, distinguished from Golden Plover by their larger size (also by the presence of a small hind toe absent in the other) ; their easy flight is a contrast to the frantic rushes of the Redshanks and others. More rarely than Redshank, Greenshank may be seen, and are known, apart from the sign of their green legs, by their larger size and, though very alert and wary, more sober ways and more musical whistle. Sanderling abound, charming little birds, studies in pearl-grey, recognized in flight by the lightness of the silvery plumage. Active and sprightly, they probe incessantly in the sand for their prey, so that when the tide ebbs a score of rows of the holes they make may be visible. Flocks of Knots explore the flats, the birds which, from haunting the margins of waves, are supposed to bear Canute's name, though probably they were

named from calling "knut, knut." Turnstones, on orange legs, are abundant too, famed for the way their awl-shaped bills turn the stones and débris in quest of sandhoppers, small crustaceans and other unconsidered trifles, as a man tosses hay; flying at speed on their pointed wings, they display their white rumps and underparts. Among all these and others goes the demure Little Stint, a six-inch long edition of a Dunlin.

On an autumn evening the marshmen mark the great V-shaped skeins of the Grey Lag-Geese, as they "wail their way from cloud to cloud." Unlike the Brent Goose and others which live by and on the salt water and feed by tidal flats the Grey-Lags resort with clock-work regularity to ancestral inland feeding-grounds, and have earned the north-country name, Harvest-Geese. Hearing the wild "gabble-retchet" of the wild Geese, old-time marshmen would say, "The hell-hounds are on the hunt."

When winter brings Golden Plover in flocks to south coast downs and marshes,

to fly in company with the Lapwings, it is always a pleasure to the countryman to hear again their musical cries. At evening on the marshes there is a wonderful charm in the wild, far-reaching call-note, which gave the old name, Whistling Plover, faintly suggested by the word, "tluwee." The birds are found the year through on northern and south-western moors, and in autumn arrive the flocks from the Continent to join our home-bred birds on mud-flats by the sea. On their native moors the gold-speckled plumage harmonises with the heather, grasses, black peat, and white cotton-grass, and in the hollow which serves for nest the sitting bird is lost to view, and eyes pass unseeingly over the gold-dusted down of the chicks when they squat for safety, while the parents lure away any intruder by familiar Plover arts. They are among our "rain-birds," as their name, derived from the French, *pluvier*, proclaims, and certainly they seem to appreciate wet and stormy weather, as if it means good feeding. All their movements have a lively grace; when feeding, they are sprightly and erect, running at high speed, and they fly with amazing swiftness.

A winter visitor to the marsh is the Short-eared Owl, sometimes called Woodcock-Owl, as its arrival heralds the Woodcock. By day it lies low, though it may be seen at times in full daylight buoyantly flying in quest of field-mice and voles. Sometimes it is flushed in turnip-fields in autumn, and when several have risen and flown solemnly round the intruder they have been aptly described as looking like the cherubims on tombstones.

Another notable winter visitor to the marsh is the little Jack Snipe, ever welcome, though it keeps itself to itself, and is remarkably silent. It is among the birds that live solitary lives. The most marked habit is the close way it sits, so close that it refuses to budge unless in danger of being trodden upon; when it goes away, it dashes off silently on a zigzag course as baffling to the gunner as mystifying to a Hawk: we recall a gunner's historical lament, "When I shoot zig it flies zag, and when I shoot zag it goes zig." It will squat under a dog's very nose, and may even allow itself to be taken in hand, or to

be taken in the gentle mouth of a setter, and brought to hand. It stays with us until the moon of April, putting on its summer plumage before setting sail for Arctic regions. Any small hollow will hide this dainty wisp of a bird, and it is wonderfully faithful to a chosen haunt, and day after day may be observed at the same spot of the marsh or rushy corner of a water-meadow.

Lovers of quiet marshes have a fellow feeling for the Snipe. The drumming of Common Snipe in spring has been well called a "healing sound," as it certainly is to one "long in city pent." It is heard when the birds are flying head to wind, and as, on their dashing love-courses, they alternately rise and steeply fall, the drumming is heard during the fall, and the key of the music changes with any change of direction. The Snipe is remarkable in differing from others of its tribe by not running if alarmed, either crouching, or shooting into the air on tortuous, zigzagging flight which carries it fifty or a hundred yards before it soars and goes straight away, perhaps out of sight, or falls like a falling star. A November interest of the marshes is to find how the Snipe increase

as flights arrive from the Continent. Sometimes they pack so closely that on settling they even land on one another's backs, yet the individuals seem to go their independent ways, as if food has drawn the company to one spot rather than any desire for society. The Snipe's bill is too delicate a structure for probing for food in frost-locked ground, and during hard frosts the birds seek spots kept soft and oozy by springs, and then become unusually tame. We observe how rarely Snipe feed with other birds; should there be any other among the Snipe in winter, it is likely to be a Water-Rail.

Sentinel-in-chief of the wastes, noisiest of his race, is the Common Curlew, ever ready to spread an alarm which will carry for miles. The winter calendar of bird life on the coast has few more fascinating pictures than that of a long line of the noble Curlew, all crying "cour-lieu," arriving, with slow and measured wing-beats, on the sandflats from the marshes. High water drives them inland, perhaps several miles, but they seem to know when the tide will go out. Marvellously wary and

wild, it might well seem that they post a loud-voiced sentry on watch while feeding, though no doubt every bird of a flock is sentinel, and ready to fly on the least alarm; even a brother Curlew's sudden flutter will cause all to spring from the mud. Besides the "cour-lieu" cry, a harsher call is expressed by "wha-up," whence the name Whaup, and in mating days soft murmurings are warbled on the wing.

Highlanders are credited with superstitious dread of these "long-nebbit things," but they were highly prized of old for the festal board, especially the "harvest Curlew" which arrived on the east coast in autumn from inland moors, their value being twelve pence, as the old Suffolk proverb states:

A Curlew, be she white or be she black,
She carries twelve pence on her back.

A family party of Sheld-Duck may be seen in summer especially on the eastern shores of Scotland, on sands and mud-flats, birds which rank high among the

ornamental water-fowl of town park ponds, causing thoughts to fly to coves of far Highland coasts, where the spotted ducklings are bred in rabbit-burrows. The hearty whistling with which the drake woos, or admonishes, his mate, draws attention to the harlequin coat—the crimson, knobbed bill, the green-black of the neck which gives way to a white and then to a chestnut band, and the gaily-painted wings. The drake takes his share of the education of the young, and does not put on a summer costume.

When in March Redshanks come to the Romney Marshes, come in the night, whistling their well-known triple note, and making their presence manifest next day by the sign of their red legs and the white wing-patch displayed in flight, to the marshmen this is a sure and certain sign of spring's real presence. They act forthwith as sentries and feathered policemen of the marshes, and are among the noisiest and wariest of shore-birds, with a piercing note, uttered when rising on the wing, which may carry a mile, to spread a

message of warning to all bird neighbours. Human intruders are greeted with wild cries, and in nesting days the birds in high excitement circle over the wayfarer's head, wheel about on quivering wings, and follow his steps with clamourings. Nuptial display is made by poising with wings stiffly pointing downwards, while melodious cries are uttered. The flight is light, wavering and jerky. When agitated, the bird alights, runs at high speed, then stands with quivering body, crying. Its activity reaches feverish heights on the shore when it is playing catch-as-catch-can for its food with the waves.

In midsummer, a deep brooding silence falls over the Romney Marshes, in which small sounds carry far, like the whetting of scythes as mowers work on the dykes' banks. But there is always the unambitious song of the Pipits; Green Woodpeckers shout exultant hurrahs; Little Owls bark; Magpies chatter and bleat. Romney Marshes, besides being the sixth continent and the eighth wonder of the

world, are named "the Land of Larks," and there a Lark will sing with almost the same joyous madness as its brother of the more refined, the thyme-scented, sea-salted air of the South Downs:

Happy, happy liver,
With a soul as strong as mountain river
Pouring out praise to the Almighty Giver.

ROXBURGHSHIRE
EDUCATION AUTHORITY
COUNTY LIBRARY

Bibliographical Note

Bibliographical Note

I make no claim for this book that it is based entirely on personal observation, for having been a life-long student and collector of books on birds I cannot now pretend to be able to separate my own ideas from those of the multitudinous authors whose works I have absorbed. There must be in this book reflections from such works as those of MacGillivray, Morris, Yarrell, Johns, and W. H. Hudson (eagerly devoured in the days of youth), together with many books on the bird life of southern counties, "Birds of Sussex," "Birds of Wiltshire," "Birds of Devon," etc., etc. Mr. Archibald Thorburn's "British Birds" (Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd.), with his exquisite coloured plates, ranks high among the most notable works on birds of recent publication, and to this authority and all others who have added to my information as reflected in this book I make grateful acknowledgments.

M. W.

Index

Index

	PAGE
Blackbird	23
Blackcap	129
Brambling	153
Bullfinch	114
Buzzard, Common	227
 Chaffinch	 110
Chiffchaff	123
Chough	203
Clirl Bunting	115
Coot	173
Cormorant	199
Corn-Bunting	148
Crossbill	139
Crow, Carrion	77
Cuckoo	63
Curlew, Common	239
Stone-	188
 Dartford Warbler	 186
Dipper	162
Dotterel	185
Dove, Rock	204
Turtle-	102
Duck, Tufted	173
Dunlin	233

	PAGE
Eagle, Golden	228
Falcon, Peregrine	206
Fieldfare	117
Firecrest	134
Flycatcher, Spotted	40
Gannet	198
Garden-Warbler	42
Godwit	233
Goldcrest	131
Golden-Eye	174
Goldfinch	113
Goose, Brent	235
Grey Lag-	235
Grasshopper-Warbler	116
Grebe, Great Crested	172
Little	173
Greenfinch	112
Greenshank	234
Guillemot	199
Grouse, Red	222
Black	224
Gull, Black-headed	193
Common	197
Great Black-backed	194
Herring	196
Hawfinch	41
Hedge-Sparrow	28
Heron	60
Hobby	138
Jackdaw	50

	PAGE
Jay	47
Kestrel	186
Kingfisher	160
Kittiwake	195
Knot	234
Land-Rail	149
Lapwing	143
Lark, Shore-	206
Sky-	180
Wood-	76
Linnet	151
Magpie	49
Mallard	170
Marsh-Warbler	167
Martin, House-	88
Sand-	92
Merlin	226
Moorhen	160
Nightingale	126
Nightjar	81
Nuthatch	72
Owl, Barn or White	134
Little	79
Long-eared	136
Short-eared.	237
Tawny, or Brown	134
Oyster-Catcher	202

	PAGE
Partridge, Common	144
Red-Legged	146
Pheasant	64
Pipit, Meadow-	104
Rock-	204
Tree-	105
Plover, Golden	235
Grey	234
Pochard	173
Ptarmigan	225
Puffin	199
 Razorbill	 199
Redbreast	13
Redpoll, Lesser	211
Redshank	241
Redstart,	40
Black	188
Redwing	117
Reed-Bunting	167
Reed-Warbler	166
Ring-Ouzel.	220
Rook	53
 Quail	 151
 Sanderling	 234
Sandpiper,	165
Curlew-	234
Sedge-Warbler	166
Shag	201
Sheld-Duck	240

	PAGE
Shrike, Red-backed	108
Siskin	215
Snipe, Common	238
Jack	237
Sparrow-Hawk	67
Sparrow, House-	43
Tree-	169
Starling	95
Stint, Little	235
Stonechat	183
Swallow	87
Swan, Mute	174
Whooper	174
Swift	93
Teal	170
Tern	197
Thrush, Mistle-	20
Song-	18
Titmouse, Blue	33
Coal-	35
Great	31
Long-tailed	212
Marsh-	37
Tree-Creeper	74
Turnstone	235
Twite	228
Wagtail, Grey	163
Pied	38
White	39
Yellow	101

	PAGE
Water-Rail	150
Wheatear	182
Whinchat	184
Whitethroat,	106
Lesser	108
Wigeon	174
Willow-Wren	124
Woodchat	109
Woodcock	80
Woodpecker, Great Spotted	71
Green	69
Lesser Spotted	72
Wood-Pigeon	130
Wood-Wren	125
Wren	29
Wryneck	61
Yellow Hammer	147

